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ROBERT FROST

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# THE POEMS OF ROBERT FROST

*With an Introductory Essay*

"THE CONSTANT SYMBOL"

*by the Author*



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# THE CONSTANT SYMBOL

There seems to be some such folk saying as that easy to understand is contemptible, hard to understand irritating. The implication is that just easy enough, just hard enough, right in the middle, is what literary criticism ought to foster. A glance backward over the past convinces me otherwise. The *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid* are easy. The *Purgatorio* is said to be hard. The Song of Songs is hard. There have been works lately to surpass all records for hardness. Some knotted riddles tell what may be worth our trouble. But hard or easy seems to me of slight use as a test either way.

Texture is surely something. A good piece of weaving takes rank with a picture as decoration for the wall of a studio, though it must be admitted to verge on the arty. There is a time of apprenticeship to texture when it shouldn't matter if the stuff is never made up into anything. There may be scraps of repeated form all over it. But form as a whole! Don't be shocking! The title of his first book was

*Fragments.* The artist has to grow up and coarsen a little before he looks on texture as not an end in itself.

| There are many other things I have found myself saying about poetry, but the chiefest of these is that it is metaphor, saying one thing and meaning another, saying one thing in terms of another, the pleasure of ulteriority. Poetry is simply made of metaphor. So also is philosophy—and science, too, for that matter, if it will take the soft impeachment from a friend. Every poem is a new metaphor inside or it is nothing. And there is a sense in which all poems are the same old metaphor always.

| Every single poem written regular is a symbol small or great of the way the will has to pitch into commitments deeper and deeper to a rounded conclusion and then be judged for whether any original intention it had has been strongly spent or weakly lost; be it in art, politics, school, church, business, love, or marriage—in a piece of work or in a career. Strongly spent is synonymous with kept.

We may speak after sentence, resenting judgment. How can the world know anything so intimate as what we were intending to do? The answer is the world presumes to know. The ruling passion in man is not as Viennese as is claimed. It is rather a gregarious instinct to keep together by minding

each other's business. Grex rather than sex. We *must* be preserved from becoming egregious. The beauty of socialism is that it will end the individuality that is always crying out mind your own business. Terence's answer would be all human business is my business. No more invisible means of support, no more invisible motives, no more invisible anything. The ultimate commitment is giving in to it that an outsider may see what we were up to sooner and better than we ourselves. The bard has said in effect, Unto these forms did I commend the spirit. It may take him a year after the act to confess he only betrayed the spirit with a rhymster's cleverness and to forgive his enemies the critics for not having listened to his oaths and protestations to the contrary. Had he anything to be true to? Was he true to it? Did he use good words? You couldn't tell unless you made out what idea they were supposed to be good for. Every poem is an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien entanglements.

Take the President in the White House. A study of the success of his intention might have to go clear back to when as a young politician, youthfully step-careless, he made the choice between the two parties of our system. He may have stood for a moment wishing he knew of a third party nearer the ideal;



but only for a moment, since he was practical. And in fact he may have been so little impressed with the importance of his choice that he left his first commitment to be made for him by his friends and relatives. It was only a small commitment anyway, like a kiss. He can scarcely remember how much credit he deserved personally for the decision it took. Calculation is usually no part in the first step in any walk. And behold him now a statesman so multifariously closed in on with obligations and answerabilities that sometimes he loses his august temper. He might as well have got himself into a sestina royal.

Or he may be a religious nature who lightly gets committed to a nameable church through an older friend in plays and games at the Y.M.C.A. The next he knows he is in a theological school and next in the pulpit of a Sunday wrestling with the angel for a blessing on his self-defensive interpretation of the Creed. What of his original intention now? At least he has had the advantage of having it more in his heart than in his head; so that he should have made shift to assert it without being chargeable with compromise. He could go a long way before he had to declare anything he could be held to. He began with freedom to squander. He has to acknowledge himself in a tighter and tighter place. But his cour-

age asked for it. It would have been the same if he had gone to the North Pole or climbed Everest. All that concerns *us* is whether his story was one of conformance or performance.

There's an indulgent smile I get for the recklessness of the unnecessary commitment I made when I came to the first line in the second stanza of a poem in this book called "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." I was riding too high to care what trouble I incurred. And it was all right so long as I didn't suffer deflection.

The poet goes in like a rope skipper to make the most of his opportunities. If he trips himself he stops the rope. He is of our stock and has been brought up by ear to choice of two metres, strict iambic and loose iambic (not to count varieties of the latter). He may have any length of line up to six feet. He may use an assortment of line lengths for any shape of stanza like Herrick in "To Daffodils." Not that he is running wild. His intention is of course a particular mood that won't be satisfied with anything less than its own fulfillment. But it is not yet a thought concerned with what becomes it. One thing to know it by: it shrinks shyly from anticipatory expression. Tell love beforehand and, as Blake says, it loses flow without filling the mould; the cast will be a reject. The freshness of a poem

belongs absolutely to its not having been thought out and then set to verse as the verse in turn might be set to music. A poem is the emotion of having a thought while the reader waits a little anxiously for the success of dawn. The only discipline to begin with is the inner mood that at worst may give the poet a false start or two like the almost microscopic filament of cotton that goes before the blunt thread-end and must be picked up first by the eye of the needle. He must be entranced to the exact premonition. No mystery is meant. When familiar friends approach each other in the street both are apt to have this experience in feeling before knowing the pleasantries they will inflict on each other in passing.

Probably there is something between the mood and the vocal imagination (images of the voice speaking) that determines a man's first commitment to metre and length of line.

Suppose him to have written down "When in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes." He has uttered about as much as he has to live up to in the theme as in the form. Odd how the two advance into the open *pari passu*. He has given out that he will descend into Hades, but he has confided in no one how far before he will turn back, or whether he will turn back at all, and by what jutting points of rock

he will pick his way. He may proceed as in blank verse. Two lines more, however, and he has let himself in for rhyme, three more and he has set himself a stanza. Up to this point his discipline has been the self-discipline whereof it is written in so great praise. The harsher discipline from without is now well begun. He who knows not both knows neither. His worldly commitments are now three or four deep. Between us, he was no doubt bent on the sonnet in the first place from habit, and what's the use in pretending he was a freer agent than he had any ambition to be? He had made most of his commitments all in one plunge. The only suspense he asks us to share with him is in the theme. He goes down, for instance, to a depth that must surprise him as much as it does us. But he doesn't even have the say of how long his piece will be. Any worry is as to whether he will outlast or last out the fourteen lines—have to cramp or stretch to come out even—have enough bread for the butter or butter for the bread. As a matter of fact, he gets through in twelve lines and doesn't know quite what to do with the last two.

Things like that and worse are the reason the sonnet is so suspect a form and has driven so many to free verse and even to the novel. Many a quatrain is salvaged from a sonnet that went agley. Dobson

confesses frankly to having changed from one form to another after starting: "I intended an Ode and it turned to a Sonnet." But he reverses the usual order of being driven from the harder down to the easier. And he has a better excuse for weakness of will than most, namely, Rose.

Jeremiah, it seems, has had his sincerity questioned because the anguish of his lamentations was tamable to the form of twenty-two stanzas for the twenty-two letters of the alphabet. The Hebrew alphabet has been kept to the twenty-two letters it came out of Egypt with, so the number twenty-two means as much form as ever.

But there they go again with the old doubt about law and order. (The communist looks forward to a day of order without law, bless his merciful heart.) To the right person it must seem naive to distrust form as such. The very words of the dictionary are a restriction to make the best of or stay out of and be silent. Coining new words isn't encouraged. We play the words as we find them. We make them do. Form in language is such a disjuncted lot of old broken pieces it seems almost as non-existent as the spirit till the two embrace in the sky. They are not to be thought of as encountering in rivalry but in creation. No judgment on either alone counts. We see what Whitman's extravagance may have meant when he said the body was the soul.

Here is where it all comes out. The mind is a baby giant who, more provident in the cradle than he knows, has hurled his paths in life all round ahead of him like playthings given—data so-called. They are vocabulary, grammar, prosody, and diary, and it will go hard if he can't find stepping stones of them for his feet wherever he wants to go. The way will be zigzag, but it will be a straight crookedness like the walking stick he cuts himself in the bushes for an emblem. He will be judged as he does or doesn't let this zig or that zag project him off out of his general direction.

Teacher or student or investigator whose chance on these defenseless lines may seize, your pardon if for once I point you out what ordinarily you would point me out. To some it will seem strange that I have written my verse regular all this time without knowing till yesterday that it was from fascination with this constant symbol I celebrate. To the right person it will seem lucky; since in finding out too much too soon there is danger of arrest. Does anyone believe I would have committed myself to the treason-reason-season rhyme-set in my "Reluctance" if I had been blasé enough to know that these three words about exhausted the possibilities? No rhyming dictionary for me to make me face the facts of rhyme. I may say the strain of rhyming is less since I came to see words as phrase-ends to

countless phrases just as the syllables ly, ing, and  
ation are word-ends to countless words. Leave  
something to learn later. We'd have lost most of  
our innocence by forty anyway even if we never  
went to school a day.

## TO THE RIGHT PERSON

### *Fourteen Lines*

In the one state of ours that is a shire  
There is a District Schoolhouse I admire—  
As much for anything for situation.  
There are few institutions standing higher  
This side the Rockies in my estimation—  
Two thousand feet above the ocean level.  
It has two entries for co-education.  
But there's a tight-shut look to either door  
And to the windows of its fenestration  
As if to say mere knowledge was the devil,  
And this school wasn't keeping any more,  
Unless for penitents who took their seat  
Upon its doorsteps as at Mercy's feet  
To make up for a lack of meditation.

ROBERT FROST

*July, 1946*

*A Boy's Will*





## THE PASTURE

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;  
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away  
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
I sha'n't be gone long.—You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf  
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,  
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.  
I sha'n't be gone long.—You come too.

## INTO MY OWN

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,  
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,  
Were not, as 'twere, the merest mask of gloom,  
But stretched away unto the edge of doom.

I should not be withheld but that some day  
Into their vastness I should steal away,  
Fearless of ever finding open land,  
Or highway where the slow wheel pours the sand.

I do not see why I should e'er turn back,  
Or those should not set forth upon my track  
To overtake me, who should miss me here  
And long to know if still I held them dear.

They would not find me changed from him they  
knew—  
Only more sure of all I thought was true.

## GHOST HOUSE

I dwell in a lonely house I know  
That vanished many a summer ago,  
    And left no trace but the cellar walls,  
    And a cellar in which the daylight falls,  
And the purple-stemmed wild raspberries grow.

O'er ruined fences the grape-vines shield  
The woods come back to the mowing field;  
    The orchard tree has grown one copse  
    Of new wood and old where the woodpecker chops;  
The footpath down to the well is healed.

I dwell with a strangely aching heart  
In that vanished abode there far apart  
    On that disused and forgotten road  
    That has no dust-bath now for the toad.  
Night comes; the black bats tumble and dart;

The whippoorwill is coming to shout  
And hush and cluck and flutter about:  
    I hear him begin far enough away  
    Full many a time to say his say  
Before he arrives to say it out.

It is under the small, dim, summer star.  
I know not who these mute folk are  
    Who share the unlit place with me—  
    Those stones out under the low-limbed tree  
Doubtless bear names that the mosses mar.

They are tireless folk, but slow and sad,  
Though two, close-keeping, are lass and lad,—  
    With none among them that ever sings,  
    And yet, in view of how many things,  
As sweet companions as might be had.

## MY NOVEMBER GUEST

My Sorrow, when she's here with me,  
Thinks these dark days of autumn rain  
Are beautiful as days can be;  
She loves the bare, the withered tree;  
She walks the sodden pasture lane.

Her pleasure will not let me stay.  
She talks and I am fain to list:  
She's glad the birds are gone away,  
She's glad her simple worsted grey  
Is silver now with clinging mist.

The desolate, deserted trees,  
The faded earth, the heavy sky,  
The beauties she so truly sees,  
She thinks I have no eye for these,  
And vexes me for reason why.

Not yesterday I learned to know  
The love of bare November days  
Before the coming of the snow,  
But it were vain to tell her so,  
And they are better for her praise.

## LOVE AND A QUESTION

A Stranger came to the door at eve,  
And he spoke the bridegroom fair.  
He bore a green-white stick in his hand,  
And, for all burden, care.  
He asked with the eyes more than the lips  
For a shelter for the night,  
And he turned and looked at the road afar  
Without a window light.

The bridegroom came forth into the porch  
With 'Let us look at the sky,  
And question what of the night to be,  
Stranger, you and I.'  
The woodbine leaves littered the yard,  
The woodbine berries were blue,  
Autumn, yes, winter was in the wind;  
'Stranger, I wish I knew.'

Within, the bride in the dusk alone  
Bent over the open fire,  
Her face rose-red with the glowing coal  
And the thought of the heart's desire.  
The bridegroom looked at the weary road,  
Yet saw but her within,  
And wished her heart in a case of gold  
And pinned with a silver pin.

The bridegroom thought it little to give  
A dole of bread, a purse,  
A heartfelt prayer for the poor of God,  
Or for the rich a curse;  
But whether or not a man was asked  
To mar the love of two  
By harboring woe in the bridal house,  
The bridegroom wished he knew.



## STARS

How countlessly they congregate  
O'er our tumultuous snow,  
Which flows in shapes as tall as trees  
When wintry winds do blow!—

As if with keenness for our fate,  
Our faltering few steps on  
To white rest, and a place of rest  
Invisible at dawn,—

And yet with neither love nor hate,  
Those stars like some snow-white  
Minerva's snow-white marble eyes  
Without the gift of sight.

## STORM FEAR

When the wind works against us in the dark,  
And pelts with snow  
The lower chamber window on the east,  
And whispers with a sort of stifled bark,  
, The beast,  
'Come out! Come out!'—  
It costs no inward struggle not to go,  
Ah, no!  
I count our strength,  
Two and a child,  
Those of us not asleep subdued to mark  
How the cold creeps as the fire dies at length,—  
How drifts are piled,  
Dooryard and road ungraded,  
Till even the comforting barn grows far away,  
And my heart owns a doubt  
Whether 'tis in us to arise with day  
And save ourselves unaided.

## TO THE THAWING WIND

Come with rain, O loud Southwester!  
Bring the singer, bring the nester;  
Give the buried flower a dream;  
Make the settled snow-bank stream;  
Find the brown beneath the white;  
But whate'er you do to-night,  
Bathe my window, make it flow,  
Melt it as the ice will go;  
Melt the glass and leave the sticks  
Like a hermit's crucifix;  
Burst into my narrow stall;  
Swing the picture on the wall;  
Run the rattling pages o'er;  
Scatter poems on the floor;  
Turn the poet out of door.

## A PRAYER IN SPRING

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers to-day;  
And give us not to think so far away  
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here  
All simply in the springing of the year.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,  
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;  
And make us happy in the happy bees,  
The swarm dilating round the perfect trees.

And make us happy in the darting bird  
That suddenly above the bees is heard,  
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,  
And off a blossom in mid air stands still.

For this is love and nothing else is love,  
The which it is reserved for God above  
To sanctify to what far ends He will,  
But which it only needs that we fulfil.

## FLOWER-GATHERING

I left you in the morning,  
And in the morning glow,  
You walked a way beside me  
To make me sad to go.  
Do you know me in the gloaming,  
Gaunt and dusty grey with roaming?  
Are you dumb because you know me not,  
Or dumb because you know?

All for me? And not a question  
For the faded flowers gay  
That could take me from beside you  
For the ages of a day?  
They are yours, and be the measure  
Of their worth for you to treasure,  
The measure of the little while  
That I've been long away.

## ROSE POGONIAS

A saturated meadow,  
Sun-shaped and jewel-small,  
A circle scarcely wider  
Than the trees around were tall;  
Where winds were quite excluded,  
And the air was stifling sweet  
With the breath of many flowers,—  
A temple of the heat.

There we bowed us in the burning,  
As the sun's right worship is,  
To pick where none could miss them  
A thousand orchises;  
For though the grass was scattered,  
Yet every second spear  
Seemed tipped with wings of color,  
That tinged the atmosphere.

We raised a simple prayer  
Before we left the spot,  
That in the general mowing  
That place might be forgot;  
Or if not all so favoured,  
Obtain such grace of hours,  
That none should mow the grass there  
While so confused with flowers.

## WAITING

### AFIELD AT DUSK

What things for dream there are when spectre-like,  
Moving among tall haycocks lightly piled,  
I enter alone upon the stubble field,  
From which the laborers' voices late have died,  
And in the antiphony of afterglow  
And rising full moon, sit me down  
Upon the full moon's side of the first haycock  
And lose myself amid so many alike.

I dream upon the opposing lights of the hour,  
Preventing shadow until the moon prevail;  
I dream upon the night-hawks peopling heaven,  
Each circling each with vague unearthly cry,  
Or plunging headlong with fierce twang afar;  
And on the bat's mute antics, who would seem  
Dimly to have made out my secret place,  
Only to lose it when he pirouettes,  
And seek it endlessly with purblind haste;  
On the last swallow's sweep; and on the rasp  
In the abyss of odor and rustle at my back,  
That, silenced by my advent, finds once more,  
After an interval, his instrument,  
And tries once—twice—and thrice if I be there;  
And on the worn book of old-golden song  
I brought not here to read, it seems, but hold

And freshen in this air of withering sweetness;  
But on the memory of one absent most,  
For whom these lines when they shall greet her eye.



## IN NEGLECT

They leave us so to the way we took,  
As two in whom they were proved mistaken,  
That we sit sometimes in the wayside nook,  
With mischievous, vagrant, seraphic look,  
And *try* if we cannot feel forsaken.

## THE VANTAGE POINT

If tired of trees I seek again mankind,  
Well I know where to hie me—in the dawn,  
To a slope where the cattle keep the lawn.  
There amid lolling juniper reclined,  
Myself unseen, I see in white defined  
Far off the homes of men, and farther still,  
The graves of men on an opposing hill,  
Living or dead, whichever are to mind.

And if by noon I have too much of these,  
I have but to turn on my arm, and lo,  
The sun-burned hillside sets my face aglow,  
My breathing shakes the bluet like a breeze,  
I smell the earth, I smell the bruised plant,  
I look into the crater of the ant.

## MOWING

There was never a sound beside the wood but one,  
And that was my long scythe whispering to the  
ground.

What was it it whispered? I knew not well myself;  
Perhaps it was something about the heat of the sun,  
Something, perhaps, about the lack of sound—  
And that was why it whispered and did not speak.  
It was no dream of the gift of idle hours,  
Or easy gold at the hand of fay or elf:  
Anything more than the truth would have seemed  
too weak

To the earnest love that laid the swale in rows,  
Not without feeble-pointed spikes of flowers  
(Pale orchises), and scared a bright green snake.  
The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.  
My long scythe whispered and left the hay to make.

## GOING FOR WATER

The well was dry beside the door,  
And so we went with pail and can  
Across the fields behind the house  
To seek the brook if still it ran;

Not loth to have excuse to go,  
Because the autumn eve was fair  
(Though chill), because the fields were ours,  
And by the brook our woods were there.

We ran as if to meet the moon  
That slowly dawned behind the trees,  
The barren boughs without the leaves,  
Without the birds, without the breeze.

But once within the wood, we paused  
Like gnomes that hid us from the moon,  
Ready to run to hiding new  
With laughter when she found us soon.

Each laid on other a staying hand  
To listen ere we dared to look,  
And in the hush we joined to make  
We heard, we knew we heard the brook.

A note as from a single place,  
A slender tinkling fall that made  
Now drops that floated on the pool  
Like pearls, and now a silver blade.

## REVELATION

We make ourselves a place apart  
Behind light words that tease and flout,  
But oh, the agitated heart  
Till someone find us really out.

'Tis pity if the case require  
(Or so we say) that in the end  
We speak the literal to inspire  
The understanding of a friend.

But so with all, from babes that play  
At hide-and-seek to God afar,  
So all who hide too well away  
Must speak and tell us where they are.

## THE TUFT OF FLOWERS

I went to turn the grass once after one  
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen  
Before I came to view the levelled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees;  
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,  
And I must be, as he had been,—alone,

‘As all must be,’ I said within my heart,  
‘Whether they work together or apart.’

But as I said it, swift there passed me by  
On noiseless wing a bewildered butterfly,

Seeking with memories grown dim o’er night  
Some resting flower of yesterday’s delight.

And once I marked his flight go round and round,  
As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

And then he flew as far as eye could see,  
And then on tremulous wing came back to me.

I thought of questions that have no reply,  
And would have turned to toss the grass to dry;

But he turned first, and led my eye to look  
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared  
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.

I left my place to know them by their name,  
Finding them butterfly weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,  
By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him,  
But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,  
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around,  
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,

And feel a spirit kindred to my own;  
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,  
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;



And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech  
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,  
'Whether they work together or apart.'

## THE DEMIURGE'S LAUGH

It was far in the sameness of the wood;  
I was running with joy on the Demon's trail,  
Though I knew what I hunted was no true god.  
It was just as the light was beginning to fail  
That I suddenly heard—all I needed to hear:  
It has lasted me many and many a year.

The sound was behind me instead of before,  
A sleepy sound, but mocking half,  
As of one who utterly couldn't care.  
The Demon arose from his wallow to laugh,  
Brushing the dirt from his eye as he went;  
And well I knew what the Demon meant:

I shall not forget how his laugh rang out.  
I felt as a fool to have been so caught,  
And checked my steps to make pretence  
It was something among the leaves I sought  
(Though doubtful whether he stayed to see).  
Thereafter I sat me against a tree.

## A LINE-STORM SONG

The line-storm clouds fly tattered and swift,  
The road is forlorn all day,  
Where a myriad snowy quartz stones lift,  
And the hoof-prints vanish away.  
The roadside flowers, too wet for the bee,  
Expend their bloom in vain.  
Come over the hills and far with me,  
And be my love in the rain.

The birds have less to say for themselves  
In the wood-world's torn despair  
Than now these numberless years the elves,  
Although they are no less there:  
All song of the woods is crushed like some  
Wild, easily shattered rose.  
Come, be my love in the wet woods, come,  
Where the boughs rain when it blows.

There is the gale to urge behind  
And bruit our singing down,  
And the shallow waters aflutter with wind  
From which to gather your gown.  
What matter if we go clear to the west,  
And come not through dry-shod?  
For wilding brooch shall wet your breast  
The rain-fresh goldenrod.

Oh, never this whelming east wind swells  
But it seems like the sea's return  
To the ancient lands where it left the shells  
Before the age of the fern;  
And it seems like the time when after doubt  
Our love came back amain.  
Oh, come forth into the storm and rout  
And be my love in the rain.

## OCTOBER

O hushed October morning mild,  
Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;  
To-morrow's wind, if it be wild,  
Should waste them all.  
The crows above the forest call;  
To-morrow they may form and go.  
O hushed October morning mild,  
Begin the hours of this day slow.  
Make the day seem to us less brief.  
Hearts not averse to being beguiled,  
Beguile us in the way you know.  
Release one leaf at break of day;  
At noon release another leaf;  
One from our trees, one far away.  
Retard the sun with gentle mist;  
Enchant the land with amethyst.  
Slow, slow!  
For the grapes' sake, if they were all,  
Whose leaves already are burnt with frost,  
Whose clustered fruit must else be lost—  
For the grapes' sake along the wall.

## RELUCTANCE

Out through the fields and the woods  
And over the walls I have wended;  
I have climbed the hills of view  
And looked at the world, and descended;  
I have come by the highway home,  
And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,  
Save those that the oak is keeping  
To ravel them one by one  
And let them go scraping and creeping  
Out over the crusted snow,  
When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,  
No longer blown hither and thither;  
The last lone aster is gone;  
The flowers of the witch-hazel wither;  
The heart is still aching to seek,  
But the feet question 'Whither?'

Ah, when to the heart of man  
Was it ever less than a treason  
To go with the drift of things,  
To yield with a grace to reason,  
And bow and accept the end  
Of a love or a season?



*North of Boston*





## MENDING WALL

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
'*Why* do they make good neighbours? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
He will not go behind his father's saying,  
And he likes having thought of it so well  
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

## THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table  
Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,  
She ran on tip-toe down the darkened passage  
To meet him in the doorway with the news  
And put him on his guard. 'Silas is back.'  
She pushed him outward with her through the door  
And shut it after her. 'Be kind,' she said.  
She took the market things from Warren's arms  
And set them on the porch, then drew him down  
To sit beside her on the wooden steps.

'When was I ever anything but kind to him?  
But I'll not have the fellow back,' he said.  
'I told him so last haying, didn't I?  
"If he left then," I said, "that ended it."  
What good is he? Who else will harbour him  
At his age for the little he can do?  
What help he is there's no depending on.  
Off he goes always when I need him most.  
"He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,  
Enough at least to buy tobacco with,  
So he won't have to beg and be beholden."  
"All right," I say, "I can't afford to pay  
Any fixed wages, though I wish I could."  
"Someone else can." "Then someone else will  
have to."  
I shouldn't mind his bettering himself

If that was what it was. You can be certain,  
When he begins like that, there's someone at him  
Trying to coax him off with pocket-money,—  
In haying time, when any help is scarce.  
In winter he comes back to us. I'm done.'

'Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you,' Mary said.

'I want him to: he'll have to soon or late.'

'He's worn out. He's asleep beside the stove.  
When I came up from Rowe's I found him here,  
Huddled against the barn-door fast asleep,  
A miserable sight, and frightening, too—  
You needn't smile—I didn't recognise him—  
I wasn't looking for him—and he's changed.  
Wait till you see.'

'Where did you say he'd been?'

'He didn't say. I dragged him to the house,  
And gave him tea and tried to make him smoke.  
I tried to make him talk about his travels.  
Nothing would do: he just kept nodding off.'

'What did he say? Did he say anything?'

'But little.'

‘Anything? Mary, confess  
He said he’d come to ditch the meadow for me.’

‘Warren!’

‘But did he? I just want to know.’

‘Of course he did. What would you have him say?  
Surely you wouldn’t grudge the poor old man  
Some humble way to save his self-respect.  
He added, if you really care to know,  
He meant to clear the upper pasture, too.  
That sounds like something you have heard before?  
Warren, I wish you could have heard the way  
He jumbled everything. I stopped to look  
Two or three times—he made me feel so queer—  
To see if he was talking in his sleep.  
He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember—  
The boy you had in haying four years since.  
He’s finished school, and teaching in his college.  
Silas declares you’ll have to get him back.  
He says they two will make a team for work:  
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!  
The way he mixed that in with other things.  
He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft  
On education—you know how they fought  
All through July under the blazing sun,  
Silas up on the cart to build the load,  
Harold along beside to pitch it on.’

'Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot.'

'Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.  
You wouldn't think they would. How some things  
linger!

Harold's young college boy's assurance piqued him.  
After so many years he still keeps finding  
Good arguments he sees he might have used.  
I sympathise. I know just how it feels  
To think of the right thing to say too late.  
Harold's associated in his mind with Latin.  
He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying  
He studied Latin like the violin  
Because he liked it—that an argument!  
He said he couldn't make the boy believe  
He could find water with a hazel prong—  
Which showed how much good school had ever  
done him.

He wanted to go over that. But most of all  
He thinks if he could have another chance  
To teach him how to build a load of hay—'

'I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.  
He bundles every forkful in its place,  
And tags and numbers it for future reference,  
So he can find and easily dislodge it  
In the unloading. Silas does that well.  
He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.  
You never see him standing on the hay  
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself.'

'He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be  
Some good perhaps to someone in the world.  
He hates to see a boy the fool of books.  
Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,  
And nothing to look backward to with pride,  
And nothing to look forward to with hope,  
So now and never any different.'

Part of a moon was falling down the west,  
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.  
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it  
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand  
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,  
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,  
As if she played unheard some tenderness  
That wrought on him beside her in the night.  
'Warren,' she said, 'he has come home to die:  
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time.'

'Home,' he mocked gently.

'Yes, what else but home?

It all depends on what you mean by home.  
Of course he's nothing to us, any more  
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us  
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail.'

'Home is the place where, when you have to go  
there,  
They have to take you in.'



‘I should have called it  
Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.’

Warren leaned out and took a step or two,  
Picked up a little stick, and brought it back  
And broke it in his hand and tossed it by.  
‘Silas has better claim on us you think  
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles  
As the road winds would bring him to his door.  
Silas has walked that far no doubt to-day.  
Why didn’t he go there? His brother’s rich,  
A somebody—director in the bank.’

‘He never told us that.’

‘We know it though.’

‘I think his brother ought to help, of course.  
I’ll see to that if there is need. He ought of right  
To take him in, and might be willing to—  
He may be better than appearances.  
But have some pity on Silas. Do you think  
If he had any pride in claiming kin  
Or anything he looked for from his brother,  
He’d keep so still about him all this time?’

‘I wonder what’s between them.’

‘I can tell you.  
Silas is what he is—we wouldn’t mind him—

But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide.  
He never did a thing so very bad.  
He don't know why he isn't quite as good  
As anybody. Worthless though he is,  
He won't be made ashamed to please his brother.'

'I can't think Si ever hurt anyone.'

'No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay  
And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged  
chairback.

He wouldn't let me put him on the lounge.  
You must go in and see what you can do.  
I made the bed up for him there to-night.  
You'll be surprised at him—how much he's broken.  
His working days are done; I'm sure of it.'

'I'd not be in a hurry to say that.'

'I haven't been. Go, look, see for yourself.  
But, Warren, please remember how it is:  
He's come to help you ditch the meadow.  
He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.  
He may not speak of it, and then he may.  
I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud  
Will hit or miss the moon.'

It hit the moon.

Then there were three there, making a dim row,  
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.

Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her,  
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited.

‘Warren?’ she questioned.

‘Dead,’ was all he answered.

## THE MOUNTAIN

The mountain held the town as in a shadow.  
I saw so much before I slept there once:  
I noticed that I missed stars in the west,  
Where its black body cut into the sky.  
Near me it seemed: I felt it like a wall  
Behind which I was sheltered from a wind.  
And yet between the town and it I found,  
When I walked forth at dawn to see new things,  
Were fields, a river, and beyond, more fields.  
The river at the time was fallen away,  
And made a widespread brawl on cobble-stones;  
But the signs showed what it had done in spring:  
Good grass-land gullied out, and in the grass  
Ridges of sand, and driftwood stripped of bark.  
I crossed the river and swung round the mountain.  
And there I met a man who moved so slow  
With white-faced oxen in a heavy cart,  
It seemed no harm to stop him altogether.

‘What town is this?’ I asked.

‘This? Lunenburg.’

Then I was wrong: the town of my sojourn,  
Beyond the bridge, was not that of the mountain,  
But only felt at night its shadowy presence.  
‘Where is your village? Very far from here?’

'There is no village—only scattered farms.  
We were but sixty voters last election.  
We can't in nature grow to many more:  
That thing takes all the room!' He moved his goad.  
The mountain stood there to be pointed at.  
Pasture ran up the side a little way,  
And then there was a wall of trees with trunks;  
After that only tops of trees, and cliffs  
Imperfectly concealed among the leaves.  
A dry ravine emerged from under boughs  
Into the pasture.

'That looks like a path.  
Is that the way to reach the top from here?—  
Not for this morning, but some other time:  
I must be getting back to breakfast now.'

'I don't advise your trying from this side.  
There is no proper path, but those that *have*  
Been up, I understand, have climbed from Ladd's.  
That's five miles back. You can't mistake the place:  
They logged it there last winter some way up.  
I'd take you, but I'm bound the other way.'

'You've never climbed it?'

'I've been on the sides,  
Deer-hunting and trout-fishing. There's a brook  
That starts up on it somewhere—I've heard say  
Right on the top, tip-top—a curious thing.

But what would interest you about the brook,  
It's always cold in summer, warm in winter.  
One of the great sights going is to see  
It steam in winter like an ox's breath,  
Until the bushes all along its banks  
Are inch-deep with the frosty spines and bristles—  
You know the kind. Then let the sun shine on it!

'There ought to be a view around the world  
From such a mountain—if it isn't wooded  
Clear to the top.' I saw through leafy screens  
Great granite terraces in sun and shadow,  
Shelves one could rest a knee on getting up—  
With depths behind him sheer a hundred feet.  
Or turn and sit on and look out and down,  
With little ferns in crevices at his elbow.

'As to that I can't say. But there's the spring,  
Right on the summit, almost like a fountain.  
That ought to be worth seeing.'

'If it's there.

You never saw it?'

I guess there's no doubt  
About its being there. I never saw it.  
It may not be right on the very top:  
It wouldn't have to be a long way down  
To have some head of water from above,  
And a *good distance* down might not be noticed

By anyone who'd come a long way up.  
One time I asked a fellow climbing it  
To look and tell me later how it was.'

'What did he say?'

'He said there was a lake  
Somewhere in Ireland on a mountain top.'

'But a lake's different. What about the spring?'

'He never got up high enough to see.  
That's why I don't advise your trying this side.  
He tried this side. I've always meant to go  
And look myself, but you know how it is:  
It doesn't seem so much to climb a mountain  
You've worked around the foot of all your life.  
What would I do? Go in my overalls,  
With a big stick, the same as when the cows  
Haven't come down to the bars at milking time?  
Or with a shotgun for a stray black bear?  
'Twouldn't seem real to climb for climbing it.'

'I shouldn't climb it if I didn't want to—  
Not for the sake of climbing. What's its name?'

'We call it Hor: I don't know if that's right.'

'Can one walk around it? Would it be too far?'

'You can drive round and keep in Lunenburg,  
But it's as much as ever you can do,  
The boundary lines keep in so close to it.  
Hor is the township, and the township's Hor—  
*And* a few houses sprinkled round the foot,  
Like boulders broken off the upper cliff,  
Rolled out a little farther than the rest.'

'Warm in December, cold in June, you say?'

'I don't suppose the water's changed at all.  
You and I know enough to know it's warm  
Compared with cold, and cold compared with warm  
But all the fun's in how you say a thing.'

'You've lived here all your life?'

'Ever since Hor  
Was no bigger than a—' What, I did not hear.  
He drew the oxen toward him with light touches  
Of his slim goad on nose and offside flank,  
Gave them their marching orders and was moving.



## A HUNDRED COLLARS

Lancaster bore him—such a little town,  
Such a great man. It doesn't see him often  
Of late years, though he keeps the old homestead  
And sends the children down there with their mother  
To run wild in the summer—a little wild.  
Sometimes he joins them for a day or two  
And sees old friends he somehow can't get near.  
They meet him in the general store at night,  
Pre-occupied with formidable mail,  
Rifling a printed letter as he talks.  
They seem afraid. He wouldn't have it so:  
Though a great scholar, he's a democrat,  
If not at heart, at least on principle.  
Lately when coming up to Lancaster,  
His train being late, he missed another train  
And had four hours to wait at Woodsville Junction  
After eleven o'clock at night. Too tired  
To think of sitting such an ordeal out,  
He turned to the hotel to find a bed.

'No room,' the night clerk said. 'Unless—'

Woodsville's a place of shrieks and wandering lamps  
And cars that shock and rattle—and *one* hotel.

'You say "unless."'

‘Unless you wouldn’t mind  
Sharing a room with someone else.’

‘Who is it?’

‘A man.’

‘So I should hope. What kind of man?’

‘I know him: he’s all right. A man’s a man.  
Separate beds, of course, you understand.’  
The night clerk blinked his eyes and dared him on.

Who’s that man sleeping in the office chair?  
Has he had the refusal of my chance?’

‘He was afraid of being robbed or murdered.  
What do you say?’

‘I’ll have to have a bed.’

The night clerk led him up three flights of stairs  
And down a narrow passage full of doors,  
At the last one of which he knocked and entered.  
‘Lafe, here’s a fellow wants to share your room.’

‘Show him this way. I’m not afraid of him.  
I’m not so drunk I can’t take care of myself.’

The night clerk clapped a bedstead on the foot.  
'This will be yours. Good-night,' he said, and went

'Lafe was the name, I think?'

'Yes, *Layfayette*.  
You got it the first time. And yours?'

'Magoon.  
Doctor Magoon.'

'A Doctor?'

'Well, a teacher.'

'Professor Square-the-circle-till-you're-tired?  
Hold on, there's something I don't think of now  
That I had on my mind to ask the first  
Man that knew anything I happened in with.  
I'll ask you later—don't let me forget it.'

The Doctor looked at Lafe and looked away.  
A man? A brute. Naked above the waist,  
He sat there creased and shining in the light,  
Fumbling the buttons in a well-starched shirt.  
'I'm moving into a size-larger shirt.  
I've felt mean lately; mean's no name for it.  
I just found what the matter was to-night:  
I've been a-choking like a nursery tree  
When it outgrows the wire band of its name tag.

I blamed it on the hot spell we've been having.  
'Twas nothing but my foolish hanging back,  
Not liking to own up I'd grown a size.  
Number eighteen this is. What size do you wear?'

The Doctor caught his throat convulsively.  
'Oh—ah—fourteen—fourteen.'

'Fourteen! You say so!

I can remember when I wore fourteen.  
And come to think I must have back at home  
More than a hundred collars, size fourteen.  
Too bad to waste them all. You ought to have  
them.  
They're yours and welcome; let me send them to  
you.  
What makes you stand there on one leg like that?  
You're not much furtherer than where Kike left you.  
You act as if you wished you hadn't come.  
Sit down or lie down, friend; you make me nervous.'

The Doctor made a subdued dash for it,  
And propped himself at bay against a pillow.

'Not that way, with your shoes on Kike's white bed.  
You can't rest that way. Let me pull your shoes off.'

'Don't touch me, please—I say, don't touch me,  
please.  
I'll not be put to bed by you, my man.'

'Just as you say. Have it your own way then.  
"My man" is it? You talk like a professor.  
Speaking of who's afraid of who, however,  
I'm thinking I have more to lose than you  
If anything should happen to be wrong.  
Who wants to cut your number fourteen throat!  
Let's have a show down as an evidence  
Of good faith. There is ninety dollars.  
Come, if you're not afraid.'

'I'm not afraid.

There's five: that's all I carry.'

'I can search you?

Where are you moving over to? Stay still.  
You'd better tuck your money under you  
And sleep on it the way I always do  
When I'm with people I don't trust at night.'

'Will you believe me if I put it there  
Right on the counterpane—that I do trust you?'

'You'd say so, Mister Man.—I'm a collector.  
My ninety isn't mine—you won't think that.  
I pick it up a dollar at a time  
All round the country for the *Weekly News*,  
Published in Bow. You know the *Weekly News*?'

'Known it since I was young.'

'Then you know me.

Now we are getting on together—talking.  
I'm sort of Something for it at the front.  
My business is to find what people want:  
They pay for it, and so they ought to have it.  
Fairbanks, he says to me—he's editor—  
"Feel out the public sentiment"—he says.  
A good deal comes on me when all is said.  
The only trouble is we disagree  
In politics: I'm Vermont Democrat—  
You know what that is, sort of double-dyed;  
The *News* has always been Republican.  
Fairbanks, he says to me, "Help us this year,"  
Meaning by us their ticket. "No," I says,  
"I can't and won't. You've been in long enough:  
It's time you turned around and boosted us.  
You'll have to pay me more than ten a week  
If I'm expected to elect Bill Taft.  
I doubt if I could do it anyway.'"

'You seem to shape the paper's policy.'

'You see I'm in with everybody, know 'em all.  
I almost know their farms as well as they do.'

'You drive around? It must be pleasant work.'

'It's business, but I can't say it's not fun.  
What I like best's the lay of different farms,

Coming out on them from a stretch of woods,  
Or over a hill or round a sudden corner.  
I like to find folks getting out in spring,  
Raking the dooryard, working near the house.  
Later they get out further in the fields.  
Everything's shut sometimes except the barn;  
The family's all away in some back meadow.  
There's a hay load a-coming—when it comes.  
And later still they all get driven in:  
The fields are stripped to lawn, the garden patches  
Stripped to bare ground, the maple trees  
To whips and poles. There's nobody about.  
The chimney, though, keeps up a good brisk smoking.  
And I lie back and ride. I take the reins  
Only when someone's coming, and the mare  
Stops when she likes: I tell her when to go.  
I've spoiled Jemima in more ways than one.  
She's got so she turns in at every house  
As if she had some sort of curvature,  
No matter if I have no errand there.  
She thinks I'm sociable. I maybe am.  
It's seldom I get down except for meals, though.  
Folks entertain me from the kitchen doorstep,  
All in a family row down to the youngest.'

'One would suppose they might not be as glad  
To see you as you are to see them.'

'Oh,  
Because I want their dollar? I don't want

Anything they've not got. I never dun.  
I'm there, and they can pay me if they like.  
I go nowhere on purpose: I happen by.  
Sorry there is no cup to give you a drink.  
I drink out of the bottle—not your style.  
Mayn't I offer you—?’

‘No, no, no, thank you.’

‘Just as you say. Here's looking at you then.—  
And now I'm leaving you a little while.  
You'll rest easier when I'm gone, perhaps—  
Lie down—let yourself go and get some sleep.  
But first—let's see—what was I going to ask you?  
Those collars—who shall I address them to,  
Suppose you aren't awake when I come back?’

‘Really, friend, I can't let you. You—may need them.’

‘Not till I shrink, when they'll be out of style.’

‘But really I—I have so many collars.’

‘I don't know who I rather would have have them.  
They're only turning yellow where they are.  
But you're the doctor as the saying is.  
I'll put the light out. Don't you wait for me:  
I've just begun the night. You get some sleep.  
I'll knock so-fashion and peep round the door  
When I come back so you'll know who it is.



There's nothing I'm afraid of like scared people.  
I don't want you should shoot me in the head.  
What am I doing carrying off this bottle?  
There now, you get some sleep.'

He shut the door.  
The Doctor slid a little down the pillow.

## HOME BURIAL

He saw her from the bottom of the stairs  
Before she saw him. She was starting down,  
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.  
She took a doubtful step and then undid it  
To raise herself and look again. He spoke  
Advancing toward her: 'What is it you see  
From up there always—for I want to know.'  
She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,  
And her face changed from terrified to dull.  
He said to gain time: 'What is it you see,'  
Mounting until she cowered under him.  
'I will find out now—you must tell me, dear.'  
She, in her place, refused him any help  
With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.  
She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see,  
Blind creature; and a while he didn't see.  
But at last he murmured, 'Oh,' and again, 'Oh.'

'What is it—what?' she said.

'Just that I see.'

'You don't,' she challenged. 'Tell me what it is.'

'The wonder is I didn't see at once.  
I never noticed it from here before.  
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.'

The little graveyard where my people are!  
So small the window frames the whole of it.  
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it?  
There are three stones of slate and one of marble,  
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight  
On the sidehill. We haven't to mind *those*.  
But I understand: it is not the stones,  
But the child's mound—'

'Don't, don't, don't, don't,' she cried.

She withdrew shrinking from beneath his arm  
That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;  
And turned on him with such a daunting look,  
He said twice over before he knew himself:  
'Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?'

'Not you! Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!  
I must get out of here. I must get air.  
I don't know rightly whether any man can.'

'Amy! Don't go to someone else this time.  
Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs.'  
He sat and fixed his chin between his fists.  
'There's something I should like to ask you, dear.'

'You don't know how to ask it.'

'Help me, then.'

Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.

‘My words are nearly always an offence.  
I don’t know how to speak of anything  
So as to please you. But I might be taught  
I should suppose. I can’t say I see how.  
A man must partly give up being a man  
With women-folk. We could have some arrangement  
By which I’d bind myself to keep hands off  
Anything special you’re a-mind to name.  
Though I don’t like such things ’twixt those that love,  
Two that don’t love can’t live together without them,  
But two that do can’t live together with them.’  
She moved the latch a little. ‘Don’t—don’t go.  
Don’t carry it to someone else this time.  
Tell me about it if it’s something human.  
Let me into your grief. I’m not so much  
Unlike other folks as your standing there  
Apart would make me out. Give me my chance.  
I do think, though, you overdo it a little.  
What was it brought you up to think it the thing  
To take your mother-loss of a first child  
So inconsolably—in the face of love.  
You’d think his memory might be satisfied—’

‘There you go sneering now!’

‘I’m not, I’m not!  
You make me angry. I’ll come down to you.

God, what a woman! And it's come to this,  
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead.'

'You can't because you don't know how to speak.  
If you had any feelings, you that dug  
With your own hand—how could you?—his little  
grave;

I saw you from that very window there,  
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,  
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly  
And roll back down the mound beside the hole.  
I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.  
And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs  
To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.  
Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice  
Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,  
But I went near to see with my own eyes.  
You could sit there with the stains on your shoes  
Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave  
And talk about your everyday concerns.  
You had stood the spade up against the wall  
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it.'

'I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.  
I'm cursed. God, if I don't believe I'm cursed.'

'I can repeat the very words you were saying.  
"Three foggy mornings and one rainy day  
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build."  
Think of it, talk like that at such a time!

What had how long it takes a birch to rot  
To do with what was in the darkened parlour.  
You *couldn't* care! The nearest friends can go  
With anyone to death, comes so far short  
They might as well not try to go at all.  
No, from the time when one is sick to death,  
One is alone, and he dies more alone.  
Friends make pretence of following to the grave,  
But before one is in it, their minds are turned  
And making the best of their way back to life  
And living people, and things they understand.  
But the world's evil. I won't have grief so  
If I can change it. Oh, I won't, I won't!

'There, you have said it all and you feel better.  
You won't go now. You're crying. Close the door.  
The heart's gone out of it: why keep it up.  
Amy! There's someone coming down the road!'

'You—oh, you think the talk is all. I must go—  
Somewhere out of this house. How can I make you—'

'If—you—do!' She was opening the door wider.  
'Where do you mean to go? First tell me that.  
I'll follow and bring you back by force. I *will*!—'

## THE BLACK COTTAGE

We chanced in passing by that afternoon  
To catch it in a sort of special picture  
Among tar-banded ancient cherry trees,  
Set well back from the road in rank lodged grass,  
The little cottage we were speaking of,  
A front with just a door between two windows,  
Fresh painted by the shower a velvet black.  
We paused, the minister and I, to look.  
He made as if to hold it at arm's length  
Or put the leaves aside that framed it in.  
'Pretty,' he said. 'Come in. No one will care.'  
The path was a vague parting in the grass  
That led us to a weathered window-sill.  
We pressed our faces to the pane. 'You see,' he said,  
'Everything's as she left it when she died.  
Her sons won't sell the house or the things in it.  
They say they mean to come and summer here  
Where they were boys. They haven't come this year.  
They live so far away—one is out west—  
It will be hard for them to keep their word.  
Anyway they won't have the place disturbed.'  
A buttoned hair-cloth lounge spread scrolling arms  
Under a crayon portrait on the wall,  
Done sadly from an old daguerreotype.  
'That was the father as he went to war.  
She always, when she talked about the war,  
Sooner or later came and leaned, half knelt

Against the lounge beside it, though I doubt  
If such unlikelike lines kept power to stir  
Anything in her after all the years.  
He fell at Gettysburg or Fredericksburg,  
I ought to know—it makes a difference which:  
Fredericksburg wasn't Gettysburg, of course.  
But what I'm getting to is how forsaken  
A little cottage this has always seemed;  
Since she went more than ever, but before—  
I don't mean altogether by the lives  
That had gone out of it, the father first,  
Then the two sons, till she was left alone.  
(Nothing could draw her after those two sons.  
She valued the considerate neglect  
She had at some cost taught them after years.)  
I mean by the world's having passed it by—  
As we almost got by this afternoon.  
It always seems to me a sort of mark  
To measure how far fifty years have brought us.  
Why not sit down if you are in no haste?  
These doorsteps seldom have a visitor.  
The warping boards pull out their own old nails  
With none to tread and put them in their place.  
She had her own idea of things, the old lady.  
And she liked talk. She had seen Garrison  
And Whittier, and had her story of them.  
One wasn't long in learning that she thought  
Whatever else the Civil War was for,  
It wasn't just to keep the States together,  
Nor just to free the slaves, though it did both.



She wouldn't have believed those ends enough  
To have given outright for them all she gave.  
Her giving somehow touched the principle  
That all men are created free and equal.  
And to hear her quaint phrases—so removed  
From the world's view to-day of all those things.  
That's a hard mystery of Jefferson's.  
What did he mean? Of course the easy way  
Is to decide it simply isn't true.  
It may not be. I heard a fellow say so.  
But never mind, the Welshman got it planted  
Where it will trouble us a thousand years.  
Each age will have to reconsider it.  
You couldn't tell her what the West was saying,  
And what the South to her serene belief.  
She had some art of hearing and yet not  
Hearing the latter wisdom of the world.  
White was the only race she ever knew.  
Black she had scarcely seen, and yellow never.  
But how could they be made so very unlike  
By the same hand working in the same stuff?  
She had supposed the war decided that.  
What are you going to do with such a person?  
Strange how such innocence gets its own way.  
I shouldn't be surprised if in this world  
It were the force that would at last prevail.  
Do you know but for her there was a time  
When to please younger members of the church,  
Or rather say non-members in the church,  
Whom we all have to think of nowadays,

I would have changed the Creed a very little?  
Not that she ever had to ask me not to;  
It never got so far as that; but the bare thought  
Of her old tremulous bonnet in the pew,  
And of her half asleep was too much for me.  
Why, I might wake her up and startle her.  
It was the words "descended into Hades"  
That seemed too pagan to our liberal youth.  
You know they suffered from a general onslaught.  
And well, if they weren't true why keep right on  
Saying them like the heathen? We could drop them.  
Only—there was the bonnet in the pew.  
Such a phrase couldn't have meant much to her.  
But suppose she had missed it from the Creed  
As a child misses the unsaid Good-night,  
And falls asleep with heartache—how should *I* feel?  
I'm just as glad she made me keep hands off,  
For, dear me, why abandon a belief  
Merely because it ceases to be true.  
Cling to it long enough, and not a doubt  
It will turn true again, for so it goes.  
Most of the change we think we see in life  
Is due to truths being in and out of favour.  
As I sit here, and oftentimes, I wish  
I could be monarch of a desert land  
I could devote and dedicate forever  
To the truths we keep coming back and back to.  
So desert it would have to be, so walled  
By mountain ranges half in summer snow,  
No one would covet it or think it worth

The pains of conquering to force change on.  
Scattered oases where men dwelt, but mostly  
Sand dunes held loosely in tamarisk  
Blown over and over themselves in idleness.  
Sand grains should sugar in the natal dew  
The babe born to the desert, the sand storm  
Retard mid-waste my cowering caravans—  
There are bees in this wall.' He struck the clapboards,  
Fierce heads looked out; small bodies pivoted.  
We rose to go. Sunset blazed on the windows.

## BLUEBERRIES

‘You ought to have seen what I saw on my way  
To the village, through Patterson’s pasture to-day:  
Blueberries as big as the end of your thumb,  
Real sky-blue, and heavy, and ready to drum  
In the cavernous pail of the first one to come!  
And all ripe together, not some of them green  
And some of them ripe! You ought to have seen!’

‘I don’t know what part of the pasture you mean.’

‘You know where they cut off the woods—let me see—  
It was two years ago—or no!—can it be  
No longer than that?—and the following fall  
The fire ran and burned it all up but the wall.’

‘Why, there hasn’t been time for the bushes to grow,  
That’s always the way with the blueberries, though:  
There may not have been the ghost of a sign  
Of them anywhere under the shade of the pine,  
But get the pine out of the way, you may burn  
The pasture all over until not a fern  
Or grass-blade is left, not to mention a stick,  
And presto, they’re up all around you as thick  
And hard to explain as a conjuror’s trick.’

‘It must be on charcoal they fatten their fruit.  
I taste in them sometimes the flavour of soot.

And after all really they're ebony skinned:  
The blue's but a mist from the breath of the wind,  
A tarnish that goes at a touch of the hand,  
And less than the tan with which pickers are tanned.'

'Does Patterson know what he has, do you think?'

'He may and not care and so leave the chewink  
To gather them for him—you know what he is.  
He won't make the fact that they're rightfully his  
An excuse for keeping us other folk out.'

'I wonder you didn't see Loren about.'

'The best of it was that I did. Do you know,  
I was just getting through what the field had to show  
And over the wall and into the road,  
When who should come by, with a democrat-load  
Of all the young chattering Lorens alive,  
But Loren, the fatherly, out for a drive.'

'He saw you, then? What did he do? Did he frown?'

'He just kept nodding his head up and down.  
You know how politely he always goes by.  
But he thought a big thought—I could tell by his eye—  
Which being expressed, might be this in effect:  
"I have left those there berries, I shrewdly suspect,  
To ripen too long. I am greatly to blame."'

‘He’s a thriftier person than some I could name.’

‘He seems to be thrifty; and hasn’t he need,  
With the mouths of all those young Lorens to feed?  
He has brought them all up on wild berries, they say,  
Like birds. They store a great many away.  
They eat them the year round, and those they don’t eat  
They sell in the store and buy shoes for their feet.’

‘Who cares what they say? It’s a nice way to live,  
Just taking what Nature is willing to give,  
Not forcing her hand with harrow and plow.’

‘I wish you had seen his perpetual bow—  
And the air of the youngsters! Not one of them turned,  
And they looked so solemn-absurdly concerned.’

‘I wish I knew half what the flock of them know  
Of where all the berries and other things grow,  
Cranberries in bogs and raspberries on top  
Of the boulder-strewn mountain, and when they  
will crop.

I met them one day and each had a flower  
Stuck into his berries as fresh as a shower;  
Some strange kind—they told me it hadn’t a name.’

‘I’ve told you how once not long after we came,  
I almost provoked poor Loren to mirth  
By going to him of all people on earth

To ask if he knew any fruit to be had  
For the picking. The rascal, he said he'd be glad  
To tell if he knew. But the year had been bad.  
There *had* been some berries—but those were all gone.  
He didn't say where they had been. He went on:  
"I'm sure—I'm sure"—as polite as could be.  
He spoke to his wife in the door, "Let me see,  
Mame, *we* don't know any good berrying place?"  
It was all he could do to keep a straight face.'

'If he thinks all the fruit that grows wild is for him,  
He'll find he's mistaken. See here, for a whim,  
We'll pick in 'he Pattersons' pasture this year.  
We'll go in the morning, that is, if it's clear,  
And the sun shines out warm: the vines must be wet.  
It's so long since I picked I almost forget  
How we used to pick berries: we took one look round,  
Then sank out of sight like trolls underground,  
And saw nothing more of each other, or heard,  
Unless when you said I was keeping a bird  
Away from its nest, and I said it was you.  
"Well, one of us is." For complaining it flew  
Around and around us. And then for a while  
We picked, till I feared you had wandered a mile,  
And I thought I had lost you. I lifted a shout  
Too loud for the distance you were, it turned out,  
For when you made answer, your voice was as low  
As talking—you stood up beside me, you know.'

'We sha'n't have the place to ourselves to enjoy—

Not likely, when all the young Lorens deploy.  
They'll be there to-morrow, or even to-night.  
They won't be too friendly—they may be polite—  
To people they look on as having no right  
To pick where they're picking. But we won't com-  
plain.  
You ought to have seen how it looked in the rain,  
The fruit mixed with water in layers of leaves,  
Like two kinds of jewels, a vision for thieves.'



## A SERVANT TO SERVANTS

I didn't make you know how glad I was  
To have you come and camp here on our land.  
I promised myself to get down some day  
And see the way you lived, but I don't know!  
With a houseful of hungry men to feed  
I guess you'd find. . . . It seems to me  
I can't express my feelings any more  
Than I can raise my voice or want to lift  
My hand (oh, I can lift it when I have to).  
Did ever you feel so? I hope you never.  
It's got so I don't even know for sure  
Whether I *am* glad, sorry, or anything.  
There's nothing but a voice-like left inside  
That seems to tell me how I ought to feel,  
And would feel if I wasn't all gone wrong.  
You take the lake. I look and look at it.  
I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water.  
I stand and make myself repeat out loud  
The advantages it has, so long and narrow,  
Like a deep piece of some old running river  
Cut short off at both ends. It lies five miles  
Straight away through the mountain notch  
From the sink window where I wash the plates,  
And all our storms come up toward the house,  
Drawing the slow waves whiter and whiter and  
whiter.  
It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuit

To step outdoors and take the water dazzle  
A sunny morning, or take the rising wind  
About my face and body and through my wrapper,  
When a storm threatened from the Dragon's Den,  
And a cold chill shivered across the lake.  
I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water,  
Our Willoughby! How did you hear of it?  
I expect, though, everyone's heard of it.  
In a book about ferns? Listen to that!  
You let things more like feathers regulate  
Your going and coming. And you like it here?  
I can see how you might. But I don't know!  
It would be different if more people came,  
For then there would be business. As it is,  
The cottages Len built, sometimes we rent them,  
Sometimes we don't. We've a good piece of shore  
That ought to be worth something, and may yet.  
But I don't count on it as much as Len.  
He looks on the bright side of everything,  
Including me. He thinks I'll be all right  
With doctoring. But it's not medicine—  
Lowe is the only doctor's dared to say so—  
It's rest I want—there, I have said it out—  
From cooking meals for hungry hired men  
And washing dishes after them—from doing  
Things over and over that just won't stay done.  
By good rights I ought not to have so much  
Put on me, but there seems no other way.  
Len says one steady pull more ought to do it.  
He says the best way out is always through.

And I agree to that, or in so far  
As that I can see no way out but through—  
Leastways for me—and then they'll be convinced.  
It's not that Len don't want the best for me.  
It was his plan our moving over in  
Beside the lake from where that day I showed you  
We used to live—ten miles from anywhere.  
We didn't change without some sacrifice,  
But Len went at it to make up the loss.  
His work's a man's, of course, from sun to sun,  
But he works when he works as hard as I do—  
Though there's small profit in comparisons.  
(Women and men will make them all the same.)  
But work ain't all. Len undertakes too much.  
He's into everything in town. This year  
It's highways, and he's got too many men  
Around him to look after that make waste.  
They take advantage of him shamefully,  
And proud, too, of themselves for doing so.  
We have four here to board, great good-for-nothings,  
Sprawling about the kitchen with their talk  
While I fry their bacon. Much they care!  
No more put out in what they do or say  
Than if I wasn't in the room at all.  
Coming and going all the time, they are:  
I don't learn what their names are, let alone  
Their characters, or whether they are safe  
To have inside the house with doors unlocked.  
I'm not afraid of them, though, if they're not  
Afraid of me. There's two can play at that.

I have my fancies: it runs in the family.  
My father's brother wasn't right. They kept him  
Locked up for years back there at the old farm.  
I've been away once—yes, I've been away.  
The State Asylum. I was prejudiced;  
I wouldn't have sent anyone of mine there;  
You know the old idea—the only asylum  
Was the poorhouse, and those who could afford,  
Rather than send their folks to such a place,  
Kept them at home; and it does seem more human.  
But it's not so: the place is the asylum.  
There they have every means proper to do with,  
And you aren't darkening other people's lives—  
Worse than no good to them, and they no good  
To you in your condition; you can't know  
Affection or the want of it in that state.  
I've heard too much of the old-fashioned way.  
My father's brother, he went mad quite young.  
Some thought he had been bitten by a dog,  
Because his violence took on the form  
Of carrying his pillow in his teeth;  
But it's more likely he was crossed in love,  
Or so the story goes. It was some girl.  
Anyway all he talked about was love.  
They soon saw he would do someone a mischief  
If he wa'n't kept strict watch of, and it ended  
In father's building him a sort of cage,  
Or room within a room, of hickory poles,  
Like stanchions in the barn, from floor to ceiling.—  
A narrow passage all the way around.

Anything they put in for furniture  
He'd tear to pieces, even a bed to lie on.  
So they made the place comfortable with straw,  
Like a beast's stall, to ease their consciences.  
Of course they had to feed him without dishes.  
They tried to keep him clothed, but he paraded  
With his clothes on his arm—all of his clothes.  
Cruel—it sounds. I 'spose they did the best  
They knew. And just when he was at the height,  
Father and mother married, and mother came,  
A bride, to help take care of such a creature,  
And accommodate her young life to his.  
That was what marrying father meant to her.  
She had to lie and hear love things made dreadful  
By his shouts in the night. He'd shout and shout  
Until the strength was shouted out of him,  
And his voice died down slowly from exhaustion.  
He'd pull his bars apart like bow and bowstring,  
And let them go and make them twang until  
His hands had worn them smooth as any oxbow.  
And then he'd crow as if he thought that child's play  
The only fun he had. I've heard them say, though,  
They found a way to put a stop to it.  
He was before my time—I never saw him;  
But the pen stayed exactly as it was  
There in the upper chamber in the ell,  
A sort of catch-all full of attic clutter.  
I often think of the smooth hickory bars.  
It got so I would say—you know, half fooling—  
'It's time I took my turn upstairs in jail'—  
Just as you will till it becomes a habit.

No wonder I was glad to get away.  
Mind you, I waited till Len said the word.  
I didn't want the blame if things went wrong.  
I was glad though, no end, when we moved out,  
And I looked to be happy, and I was,  
As I said, for a while—but I don't know!  
Somehow the change wore out like a prescription.  
And there's more to it than just window-views  
And living by a lake. I'm past such help—  
Unless Len took the notion, which he won't,  
And I won't ask him—it's not sure enough.  
I s'pose I've got to go the road I'm going:  
Other folks have to, and why shouldn't I?  
I almost think if I could do like you,  
Drop everything and live out on the ground—  
But it might be, come night, I shouldn't like it,  
Or a long rain. I should soon get enough,  
And be glad of a good roof overhead.  
I've lain awake thinking of you, I'll warrant,  
More than you have yourself, some of these nights.  
The wonder was the tents weren't snatched away  
From over you as you lay in your beds.  
I haven't courage for a risk like that.  
Bless you, of course, you're keeping me from work,  
But the thing of it is, I need to *be* kept.  
There's work enough to do—there's always that;  
But behind's behind. The worst that you can do  
Is set me back a little more behind.  
I sha'n't catch up in this world, anyway.  
I'd *rather* you'd not go unless you must.

## AFTER APPLE-PICKING

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a  
tree  
Toward heaven still,  
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill  
Beside it, and there may be two or three  
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.  
But I am done with apple-picking now.  
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,  
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.  
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight  
I got from looking through a pane of glass  
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough  
And held against the world of hoary grass.  
It melted, and I let it fall and break.  
But I was well  
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,  
And I could tell  
What form my dreaming was about to take.  
Magnified apples appear and disappear,  
Stem end and blossom end,  
And every fleck of russet showing clear.  
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,  
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.  
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.  
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin  
The rumbling sound  
Of load on load of apples coming in.

For I have had too much  
Of apple-picking: I am overtired  
Of the great harvest I myself desired.  
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,  
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.  
For all  
That struck the earth,  
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,  
Went surely to the cider-apple heap  
As of no worth.  
One can see what will trouble  
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.  
Were he not gone,  
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his  
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,  
Or just some human sleep.



## THE CODE

There were three in the meadow by the brook  
Gathering up windrows, piling cocks of hay,  
With an eye always lifted toward the west  
Where an irregular sun-bordered cloud  
Darkly advanced with a perpetual dagger  
Flickering across its bosom. Suddenly  
One helper, thrusting pitchfork in the ground,  
Marched himself off the field and home. One stayed.  
The town-bred farmer failed to understand.

‘What is there wrong?’

‘Something you just now said.’

‘What did I say?’

‘About our taking pains.’

‘To cock the hay?—because it’s going to shower?  
I said that more than half an hour ago.  
I said it to myself as much as you.’

‘You didn’t know. But James is one big fool.  
He thought you meant to find fault with his work.  
That’s what the average farmer would have meant.  
James would take time, of course, to chew it over  
Before he acted: he’s just got round to act.’

‘He is a fool if that’s the way he takes me.’

‘Don’t let it bother you. You’ve found out something.  
The hand that knows his business won’t be told  
To do work better or faster—those two things.  
I’m as particular as anyone:  
Most likely I’d have served you just the same.  
But I know you don’t understand our ways.  
You were just talking what was in your mind,  
What was in all our minds, and you weren’t hinting.  
Tell you a story of what happened once:  
I was up here in Salem at a man’s  
Named Sanders with a gang of four or five  
Doing the haying. No one liked the boss.  
He was one of the kind sports call a spider,  
All wiry arms and legs that spread out wavy  
From a humped body nigh as big’s a biscuit  
But work! that man could work, especially  
If by so doing he could get more work  
Out of his hired help. I’m not denying  
He was hard on himself. I couldn’t find  
That he kept any hours—not for himself.  
Daylight and lantern-light were one to him:  
I’ve heard him pounding in the barn all night.  
But what he liked was someone to encourage.  
Them that he couldn’t lead he’d get behind  
And drive, the way you can, you know, in mowing—  
Keep at their heels and threaten to mow their legs off  
I’d seen about enough of his bulling tricks  
(We call that bulling). I’d been watching him.

So when he paired off with me in the hayfield  
To load the load, thinks I, Look out for trouble.  
I built the load and topped it off; old Sanders  
Combed it down with a rake and says, "O. K."  
Everything went well till we reached the barn  
With a big jag to empty in a bay.  
You understand that meant the easy job  
For the man up on top of throwing *down*  
The hay and rolling it off wholesale,  
Where on a mow it would have been slow lifting.  
You wouldn't think a fellow'd need much urging  
Under those circumstances, would you now?  
But the old fool seizes his fork in both hands,  
And looking up bewhiskered out of the pit,  
Shouts like an army captain, "Let her come!"  
Thinks I, D'ye mean it? "What was that you said?"  
I asked out loud, so's there'd be no mistake,  
"Did you say, Let her come?" "Yes, let her come."  
He said it over, but he said it softer.  
Never you say a thing like that to a man,  
Not if he values what he is. God, I'd as soon  
Murdered him as left out his middle name.  
I'd built the load and knew right where to find it.  
Two or three forkfuls I picked lightly round for  
Like meditating, and then I just dug in  
And dumped the rackful on him in ten lots.  
I looked over the side once in the dust  
And caught sight of him treading-water-like,  
Keeping his head above. "Damn ye," I says,

"That gets ye!" He squeaked like a squeezed rat.  
That was the last I saw or heard of him.  
I cleaned the rack and drove out to cool off.  
As I sat mopping hayseed from my neck,  
And sort of waiting to be asked about it,  
One of the boys sings out, "Where's the old man?"  
"I left him in the barn under the hay.  
If ye want him, ye can go and dig him out."  
They realized from the way I swobbed my neck  
More than was needed something must be up.  
They headed for the barn; I stayed where I was.  
They told me afterward. First they forked hay,  
A lot of it, out into the barn floor.  
Nothing! They listened for him. Not a rustle.  
I guess they thought I'd spiked him in the temple  
Before I buried him, or I couldn't have managed.  
They excavated more. "Go keep his wife  
Out of the barn." Someone looked in a window,  
And curse me if he wasn't in the kitchen  
Slumped way down in a chair, with both his feet  
Against the stove, the hottest day that summer.  
He looked so clean disgusted from behind  
There was no one that dared to stir him up,  
Or let him know that he was being looked at.  
Apparently I hadn't buried him  
(I may have knocked him down); but my just trying  
To bury him had hurt his dignity.  
He had gone to the house so's not to meet me.  
He kept away from us all afternoon.

We tended to his hay. We saw him out  
After a while picking peas in his garden:  
He couldn't keep away from doing something.'

'Weren't you relieved to find he wasn't dead?'

No! and yet I don't know—it's hard to say.  
I went about to kill him fair enough.'

'You took an awkward way. Did he discharge you?'

'Discharge me? No! He knew I did just right.'

## THE GENERATIONS OF MEN

A governor it was proclaimed this time,  
When all who would come seeking in New  
Hampshire

Ancestral memories might come together.  
And those of the name Stark gathered in Bow,  
A rock-strewn town where farming has fallen off,  
And sprout-lands flourish where the axe has gone.  
Someone had literally run to earth  
In an old cellar hole in a by-road  
The origin of all the family there.  
Thence they were sprung, so numerous a tribe  
That now not all the houses left in town  
Made shift to shelter them without the help  
Of here and there a tent in grove and orchard.  
They were at Bow, but that was not enough:  
Nothing would do but they must fix a day  
To stand together on the crater's verge  
That turned them on the world, and try to fathom  
The past and get some strangeness out of it.  
But rain spoiled all. The day began uncertain,  
With clouds low trailing and moments of rain that  
misted.

The young folk held some hope out to each other  
Till well toward noon when the storm settled down  
With a swish in the grass. 'What if the others  
Are there,' they said. 'It isn't going to rain.'  
Only one from a farm not far away

Strolled thither, not expecting he would find  
Anyone else, but out of idleness.  
One, and one other, yes, for there were two.  
The second round the curving hillside road  
Was a girl; and she halted some way off  
To reconnoitre, and then made up her mind  
At least to pass by and see who he was,  
And perhaps hear some word about the weather.  
This was some Stark she didn't know. He nodded.  
'No fête to-day,' he said.

'It looks that way.'

She swept the heavens, turning on her heel.  
'I only idled down.'

'I idled down.'

Provision there had been for just such meeting  
Of stranger cousins, in a family tree  
Drawn on a sort of passport with the branch  
Of the one bearing it done in detail—  
Some zealous one's laborious device.  
She made a sudden movement toward her bodice,  
As one who clasps her heart. They laughed together.  
'Stark?' he inquired. 'No matter for the proof.'

'Yes, Stark. And you?'

'I'm Stark.' He drew his passport.

'You know we might not be and still be cousins:  
The town is full of Chases, Lowes, and Baileys,  
All claiming some priority in Starkness.  
My mother was a Lane, yet might have married  
Anyone upon earth and still her children  
Would have been Starks, and doubtless here to-day.'

'You riddle with your genealogy  
Like a Viola. I don't follow you.'

'I only mean my mother was a Stark  
Several times over, and by marrying father  
No more than brought us back into the name.'

'One ought not to be thrown into confusion  
By a plain statement of relationship,  
But I own what you say makes my head spin.  
You take my card—you seem so good at such things—  
And see if you can reckon our cousinship.  
Why not take seats here on the cellar wall  
And dangle feet among the raspberry vines?'

'Under the shelter of the family tree.'

'Just so—that ought to be enough protection.'

'Not from the rain. I think it's going to rain.'

'It's raining.'



‘No, it’s misting; let’s be fair.  
Does the rain seem to you to cool the eyes?’

The situation was like this: the road  
Bowed outward on the mountain half-way up,  
And disappeared and ended not far off.  
No one went home that way. The only house  
Beyond where they were was a shattered seedpod.  
And below roared a brook hidden in trees,  
The sound of which was silence for the place.  
This he sat listening to till she gave judgment.

‘On father’s side, it seems, we’re—let me see—’

‘Don’t be too technical.—You have three cards.’

‘Four cards, one yours, three mine, one for each  
branch  
Of the Stark family I’m a member of.’

‘D’you know a person so related to herself  
Is supposed to be mad.’

‘I may be mad.’

‘You look so, sitting out here in the rain  
Studying genealogy with me  
You never saw before. What will we come to  
With all this pride of ancestry, we Yankees?  
I think we’re all mad. Tell me why we’re here

Drawn into town about this cellar hole  
Like wild geese on a lake before a storm?  
What do we see in such a hole, I wonder.'

'The Indians had a myth of Chicamoztoc,  
Which means The Seven Caves that We Came out of.  
This is the pit from which we Starks were digged.'

'You must be learned. That's what you see in it?'

'And what do you see?'

'Yes, what *do* I see?  
First let me look. I see raspberry vines—'

'Oh, if you're going to use your eyes, just hear  
What *I* see. It's a little, little boy,  
As pale and dim as a match flame in the sun;  
He's groping in the cellar after jam,  
He thinks it's dark and it's flooded with daylight.'

'He's nothing. Listen. When I lean like this  
I can make out old Grandsir Stark distinctly,—  
With his pipe in his mouth and his brown jug—  
Bless you, it isn't Grandsir Stark, it's Granny,  
But the pipe's there and smoking and the jug.  
She's after cider, the old girl, she's thirsty;  
Here's hoping she gets her drink and gets out safely.'

'Tell me about her. Does she look like me?'

'She should, shouldn't she, you're so many times  
Over descended from her. I believe  
She does look like you. Stay the way you are.  
The nose is just the same, and so's the chin—  
Making allowance, making due allowance.'

'You poor, dear, great, great, great, great Granny!'

'See that you get her greatness right. Don't stint her.'

'Yes, it's important, though you think it isn't.  
I won't be teased. But see how wet I am.'

'Yes, you must go; we can't stay here for ever.  
But wait until I give you a hand up.  
A bead of silver water more or less  
Strung on your hair won't hurt your summer looks  
I wanted to try something with the noise  
That the brook raises in the empty valley.  
We have seen visions—now consult the voices.  
Something I must have learned riding in trains  
When I was young. I used to use the roar  
To set the voices speaking out of it,  
Speaking or singing, and the band-music playing  
Perhaps you have the art of what I mean.  
I've never listened in among the sounds  
That a brook makes in such a wild descent.  
It ought to give a purer oracle.'

'It's as you throw a picture on a screen:  
The meaning of it all is out of you;  
The voices give you what you wish to hear.'

'Strangely, it's anything they wish to give.'

'Then I don't know. It must be strange enough.  
I wonder if it's not your make-believe.  
What do you think you're like to hear to-day?'

'From the sense of our having been together—  
But why take time for what I'm like to hear?  
I'll tell you what the voices really say.  
You will do very well right where you are  
A little longer. I mustn't feel too hurried,  
Or I can't give myself to hear the voices.'

'Is this some trance you are withdrawing into?'

'You must be very still; you mustn't talk.'

'I'll hardly breathe.'

'The voices seem to say—'

'I'm waiting.'

'Don't! The voices seem to say:  
Call her Nausicaa, the unafraid  
Of an acquaintance made adventurously.'

‘I let you say that—on consideration.’

‘I don’t see very well how you can help it.  
You want the truth. I speak but by the voices.  
You see they know I haven’t had your name,  
Though what a name should matter between us—

‘I shall suspect—’

‘Be good. The voices say:  
Call her Nausicaa, and take a timber  
That you shall find lies in the cellar charred  
Among the raspberries, and hew and shape it  
For a door-sill or other corner piece  
In a new cottage on the ancient spot.  
The life is not yet all gone out of it.  
And come and make your summer dwelling here,  
And perhaps she will come, still unafraid,  
And sit before you in the open door  
With flowers in her lap until they fade,  
But not come in across the sacred sill—’

‘I wonder where your oracle is tending.  
You can see that there’s something wrong with it,  
Or it would speak in dialect. Whose voice  
Does it purport to speak in? Not old Grandsir’s  
Nor Granny’s, surely. Call up one of them.  
They have best right to be heard in this place.’

'You seem so partial to our great-grandmother  
(Nine times removed. Correct me if I err.)  
You will be likely to regard as sacred  
Anything she may say. But let me warn you,  
Folks in her day were given to plain speaking.  
You think you'd best tempt her at such a time?'

'It rests with us always to cut her off.'

'Well then, it's Granny speaking: "I dunnow!  
Mebbe I'm wrong to take it as I do.  
There ain't no names quite like the old ones  
though,  
Nor never will be to my way of thinking.  
One mustn't bear too hard on the new comers,  
But there's a dote too many of them for comfort.  
I should feel easier if I could see  
More of the salt wherewith they're to be salted.  
Son, you do as you're told! You take the timber—  
It's as sound as the day when it was cut—  
And begin over—" There, she'd better stop.  
You can see what is troubling Granny, though.  
But don't you think we sometimes make too much  
Of the old stock? What counts is the ideals,  
And those will bear some keeping still about.'

'I can see we are going to be good friends.'

'I like your "going to be." You said just now  
It's going to rain.'

‘I know, and it was raining.  
I let you say all that. But I must go now.’

‘You let me say it? on consideration?  
How shall we say good-bye in such a case?’

‘How shall we?’

‘Will you leave the way to me?’

‘No, I don’t trust your eyes. You’ve said enough.  
Now give me your hand up.—Pick me that flower.’

‘Where shall we meet again?’

‘Nowhere but here  
Once more before we meet elsewhere.’

‘In rain?’

‘It ought to be in rain. Sometime in rain.  
In rain to-morrow, shall we, if it rains?  
But if we must, in sunshine.’ So she went.

## THE HOUSEKEEPER

I let myself in at the kitchen door.

'It's you,' she said. 'I can't get up. Forgive me  
Not answering your knock. I can no more  
Let people in than I can keep them out.  
I'm getting too old for my size, I tell them.  
My fingers are about all I've the use of  
So's to take any comfort. I can sew:  
I help out with this beadwork what I can.'

'That's a smart pair of pumps you're beading there.  
Who are they for?'

'You mean?—oh, for some miss.  
I can't keep track of other people's daughters.  
Lord, if I were to dream of everyone  
Whose shoes I primped to dance in!'

'And where's John?'

'Haven't you seen him? Strange what set you off  
To come to his house when he's gone to yours.  
You can't have passed each other. I know what:  
He must have changed his mind and gone to Gar-  
land's.  
He won't be long in that case. You can wait.  
Though what good you can be, or anyone—  
It's gone so far. You've heard? Estelle's run off.'



'Yes, what's it all about? When did she go?'

'Two weeks since.'

'She's in earnest, it appears.'

'I'm sure she won't come back. She's hiding somewhere.

I don't know where myself. John thinks I do.

He thinks I only have to say the word,

And she'll come back. But, bless you, I'm her mother—  
I can't talk to her, and, Lord, if I could!'

'It will go hard with John. What will he do?

He can't find anyone to take her place.'

'Oh, if you ask me that, what *will* he do?

He gets some sort of bakeshop meals together,

With me to sit and tell him everything,

What's wanted and how much and where it is.

But when I'm gone—of course I can't stay here:

Estelle's to take me when she's settled down.

He and I only hinder one another.

I tell them they can't get me through the door,  
though:

I've been built in here like a big church organ.

We've been here fifteen years.'

'That's a long time

To live together and then pull apart.

How do you see him living when you're gone?  
'Two of you out will leave an empty house.'

'I don't just see him living many years,  
Left here with nothing but the furniture.  
I hate to think of the old place when we're gone,  
With the brook going by below the yard,  
And no one here but hens blowing about.  
If he could sell the place, but then, he can't:  
No one will ever live on it again.  
It's too run down. This is the last of it.  
What I think he will do, is let things smash.  
He'll sort of swear the time away. He's awful!  
I never saw a man let family troubles  
Make so much difference in his man's affairs.  
He's just dropped everything. He's like a child.  
I blame his being brought up by his mother.  
He's got hay down that's been rained on three times.  
He hoed a little yesterday for me:  
I thought the growing things would do him good:  
Something went wrong. I saw him throw the hoe  
Sky-high with both hands. I can see it now—  
Come here—I'll show you—in that apple tree.  
That's no way for a man to do at his age:  
He's fifty-five, you know, if he's a day.'

'Aren't you afraid of him? What's that gun for?'

'Oh, that's been there for hawks since chicken-time.  
John Hall touch me! Not if he knows his friends.'

I'll say that for him, John's no threatener  
Like some men folk. No one's afraid of him;  
All is, he's made up his mind not to stand  
What he has got to stand.'

'Where is Estelle?  
Couldn't one talk to her? What does she say?  
You say you don't know where she is.'

'Nor want to!  
She thinks if it was bad to live with him,  
It must be right to leave him.'

'Which is wrong!'

'Yes, but he should have married her.'

'I know.'

'The strain's been too much for her all these years:  
I can't explain it any other way.  
It's different with a man, at least with John:  
He knows he's kinder than the run of men.  
Better than married ought to be as good  
As married—that's what he has always said.  
I know the way he's felt—but all the same!'

'I wonder why he doesn't marry her  
And end it.'

‘Too late now: she wouldn’t have him.  
He’s given her time to think of something else.  
That’s his mistake. The dear knows my interest  
Has been to keep the thing from breaking up.  
This is a good home: I don’t ask for better.  
But when I’ve said, “Why shouldn’t they be married,”  
He’d say, “Why should they?” no more words than  
that.’

‘And after all why should they? John’s been fair  
I take it. What was his was always hers.  
There was no quarrel about property.’

‘Reason enough, there was no property.  
A friend or two as good as own the farm,  
Such as it is. It isn’t worth the mortgage.’

‘I mean Estelle has always held the purse.’

‘The rights of that are harder to get at.  
I guess Estelle and I have filled the purse.  
’Twas we let him have money, not he us.  
John’s a bad farmer. I’m not blaming him.  
Take it year in, year out, he doesn’t make much.  
We came here for a home for me, you know,  
Estelle to do the housework for the board  
Of both of us. But look how it turns out:  
She seems to have the housework, and besides  
Half of the outdoor work, though as for that,  
He’d say she does it more because she likes it.

You see our pretty things are all outdoors.  
Our hens and cows and pigs are always better  
Than folks like us have any business with.  
Farmers around twice as well off as we  
Haven't as good. They don't go with the farm.  
One thing you can't help liking about John,  
He's fond of nice things—too fond, some would say.  
But Estelle don't complain: she's like him there.  
She wants our hens to be the best there are.  
You never saw this room before a show,  
Full of lank, shivery, half-drowned birds  
In separate coops, having their plumage done.  
The smell of the wet feathers in the heat!  
You spoke of John's not being safe to stay with.  
You don't know what a gentle lot we are:  
We wouldn't hurt a hen! You ought to see us  
Moving a flock of hens from place to place.  
We're not allowed to take them upside down,  
All we can hold together by the legs.  
Two at a time's the rule, one on each arm,  
No matter how far and how many times  
We have to go.'

'You mean that's John's idea.'

'And we live up to it; or I don't know  
What childishness he wouldn't give way to.  
He manages to keep the upper hand  
On his own farm. He's boss. But as to hens:  
We fence our flowers in and the hens range.

Nothing's too good for them. We say it pays.  
John likes to tell the offers he has had,  
Twenty for this cock, twenty-five for that.  
He never takes the money. If they're worth  
That much to sell, they're worth as much to keep.  
Bless you, it's all expense, though. Reach me down  
The little tin box on the cupboard shelf,  
The upper shelf, the tin box. That's the one.  
I'll show you. Here you are.'

'What's this?'

'A bill—

For fifty dollars for one Langshang cock—  
Receipted. And the cock is in the yard.'

'Not in a glass case, then?'

'He'd need a tall one:

He can eat off a barrel from the ground.  
He's been in a glass case, as you may say,  
The Crystal Palace, London. He's imported.  
John bought him, and we paid the bill with beads—  
Wampum, I call it. Mind, we don't complain.  
But you see, don't you, we take care of him.'

'And like it, too. It makes it all the worse.'

'It seems as if. And that's not all: he's helpless  
In ways that I can hardly tell you of.

Sometimes he gets possessed to keep accounts  
To see where all the money goes so fast.  
You know how men will be ridiculous.  
But it's just fun the way he gets bedeviled—  
If he's untidy now, what will he be—?

'It makes it all the worse. You must be blind.'

'Estelle's the one. You needn't talk to me.'

'Can't you and I get to the root of it?  
What's the real trouble? What will satisfy her?'

'It's as I say: she's turned from him, that's all.'

'But why, when she's well off? Is it the neighbours,  
Being cut off from friends?'

'We have our friends.  
That isn't it. Folks aren't afraid of us.'

'She's let it worry her. You stood the strain,  
And you're her mother.'

'But I didn't always.  
I didn't relish it along at first.  
But I got wonted to it. And besides—  
John said I was too old to have grandchildren.  
But what's the use of talking when it's done?  
She won't come back—it's worse than that—she can't.'

‘Why do you speak like that? What do you know?  
What do you mean?—she’s done harm to herself?’

‘I mean she’s married—married someone else.’

‘Oho, oho!’

‘You don’t believe me.’

‘Yes, I do,  
Only too well. I knew there must be something!  
So that was what was back. She’s bad, that’s all!’

‘Bad to get married when she had the chance?’

‘Nonsense! See what she’s done! But who, but who—’

‘Who’d marry her straight out of such a mess?  
Say it right out—no matter for her mother.  
The man was found. I’d better name no names.  
John himself won’t imagine who he is.’

‘Then it’s all up. I think I’ll get away.  
You’ll be expecting John. I pity Estelle;  
I suppose she deserves some pity, too.  
You ought to have the kitchen to yourself  
To break it to him. You may have the job.’

‘You needn’t think you’re going to get away.  
John’s almost here. I’ve had my eye on someone



Coming down Ryan's Hill. I thought 'twas him.  
Here he is now. This box! Put it away.  
And this bill.'

'What's the hurry? He'll unhitch.'

'No, he won't, either. He'll just drop the reins  
And turn Doll out to pasture, rig and all.  
She won't get far before the wheels hang up  
On something—there's no harm. See, there he is!  
My, but he looks as if he must have heard!'

John threw the door wide but he didn't enter.  
'How are you, neighbour? Just the man I'm after.  
Isn't it Hell,' he said. 'I want to know.  
Come out here if you want to hear me talk.  
I'll talk to you, old woman, afterward.  
I've got some news that maybe isn't news.  
What are they trying to do to me, these two?'

'Do go along with him and stop his shouting.'  
She raised her voice against the closing door:  
'Who wants to hear your news, you—dreadful fool?'

## THE FEAR

A lantern light from deeper in the barn  
Shone on a man and woman in the door  
And threw their lurching shadows on a house  
Near by, all dark in every glossy window.  
A horse's hoof pawed once the hollow floor,  
And the back of the gig they stood beside  
Moved in a little. The man grasped a wheel,  
The woman spoke out sharply, 'Whoa, stand still!  
I saw it just as plain as a white plate,'  
She said, 'as the light on the dashboard ran  
Along the bushes at the roadside—a man's face.  
You *must* have seen it too.'

'I didn't see it.

Are you sure—'

'Yes, I'm sure!'

'—it was a face?'

'Joel, I'll have to look. I can't go in,  
I can't, and leave a thing like that unsettled.  
Doors locked and curtains drawn will make no difference.

I always have felt strange when we came home  
To the dark house after so long an absence,  
And the key rattled loudly into place

Seemed to warn someone to be getting out  
At one door as we entered at another.  
What if I'm right, and someone all the time—  
Don't hold my arm!

'I say it's someone passing.'

'You speak as if this were a travelled road.  
You forget where we are. What is beyond  
That he'd be going to or coming from  
At such an hour of night, and on foot too?  
What was he standing still for in the bushes?'

'It's not so very late—it's only dark.  
There's more in it than you're inclined to say.  
Did he look like—?'

'He looked like anyone.  
I'll never rest to-night unless I know.  
Give me the lantern.'

'You don't want the lantern.'

She pushed past him and got it for herself.

'You're not to come,' she said. 'This is my business  
If the time's come to face it, I'm the one  
To put it the right way. He'd never dare—  
Listen! He kicked a stone. Hear that, hear that!  
He's coming towards us. Joel, go in—please.  
Hark!—I don't hear him now. But please go in.'

'In the first place you can't make me believe  
it's—'

'It is—or someone else he's sent to watch.  
And now's the time to have it out with him  
While we know definitely where he is.  
Let him get off and he'll be everywhere  
Around us, looking out of trees and bushes  
Till I sha'n't dare to set a foot outdoors.  
And I can't stand it. Joel, let me go!'

'But it's nonsense to think he'd care enough.'

'You mean you couldn't understand his caring.  
Oh, but you see he hadn't had enough—  
Joel, I won't—I won't—I promise you.  
We mustn't say hard things. You mustn't either.'

'I'll be the one, if anybody goes!  
But you give him the advantage with this light.  
What couldn't he do to us standing here!  
And if to see was what he wanted, why  
He has seen all there was to see and gone.'

He appeared to forget to keep his hold,  
But advanced with her as she crossed the grass.

'What do you want?' she cried to all the dark.  
She stretched up tall to overlook the light  
That hung in both hands hot against her skirt.

‘There’s no one; so you’re wrong,’ he said.

‘There is.—

What do you want?’ she cried, and then herself  
Was startled when an answer really came.

‘Nothing.’ It came from well along the road.

She reached a hand to Joel for support:  
The smell of scorching woollen made her faint.

‘What are you doing round this house at night?’

‘Nothing.’ A pause: there seemed no more to say.

And then the voice again: ‘You seem afraid.  
I saw by the way you whipped up the horse.  
I’ll just come forward in the lantern light  
And let you see.’

‘Yes, do.—Joel, go back!’

She stood her ground against the noisy steps  
That came on, but her body rocked a little.

‘You see,’ the voice said.

‘Oh.’ She looked and looked.

‘You don’t see—I’ve a child here by the hand.  
A robber wouldn’t have his family with him.’

‘What’s a child doing at this time of night—?’

‘Out walking. Every child should have the memory  
Of at least one long-after-bedtime walk.  
What, son?’

‘Then I should think you’d try to find  
Somewhere to walk—’

‘The highway, as it happens—  
We’re stopping for the fortnight down at Dean’s.’

‘But if that’s all—Joel—you realize—  
You won’t think anything. You understand?  
You understand that we have to be careful.  
This is a very, very lonely place.  
Joel!’ She spoke as if she couldn’t turn.  
The swinging lantern lengthened to the ground,  
It touched, it struck, it clattered and went out.

## THE WOOD-PILE

Out walking in the frozen swamp one grey day,  
I paused and said, 'I will turn back from here.  
No, I will go on farther—and we shall see.'  
The hard snow held me, save where now and then  
One foot went through. The view was all in lines  
Straight up and down of tall slim trees  
Too much alike to mark or name a place by  
So as to say for certain I was here  
Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.  
A small bird flew before me. He was careful  
To put a tree between us when he lighted,  
And say no word to tell me who he was  
Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought.  
He thought that I was after him for a feather—  
The white one in his tail; like one who takes  
Everything said as personal to himself.  
One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.  
And then there was a pile of wood for which  
I forgot him and let his little fear  
Carry him off the way I might have gone,  
Without so much as wishing him good-night.  
He went behind it to make his last stand.  
It was a cord of maple, cut and split  
And piled—and measured, four by four by eight.  
And not another like it could I see.  
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.  
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,

Or even last year's or the year's before.  
The wood was grey and the bark warping off it  
And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis  
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.  
What held it though on one side was a tree  
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,  
These latter about to fall. I thought that only  
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks  
Could so forget his handiwork on which  
He spent himself, the labour of his axe,  
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace  
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could  
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.



## GOOD HOURS

I had for my winter evening walk—  
No one at all with whom to talk,  
But I had the cottages in a row  
Up to their shining eyes in snow.

And I thought I had the folk within:  
I had the sound of a violin;  
I had a glimpse through curtain laces  
Of youthful forms and youthful faces.

I had such company outward bound.  
I went till there were no cottages found.  
I turned and repented, but coming back  
I saw no window but that was black.

Over the snow my creaking feet  
Disturbed the slumbering village street  
Like profanation, by your leave,  
At ten o'clock of a winter eve.

*Mountain Interval*



## THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

## CHRISTMAS TREES

### A CHRISTMAS CIRCULAR LETTER

The city had withdrawn into itself  
And left at last the country to the country;  
When between whirls of snow not come to lie  
And whirls of foliage not yet laid, there drove  
A stranger to our yard, who looked the city,  
Yet did in country fashion in that there  
He sat and waited till he drew us out  
A-buttoning coats to ask him who he was.  
He proved to be the city come again  
To look for something it had left behind  
And could not do without and keep its Christmas.  
He asked if I would sell my Christmas trees;  
My woods—the young fir balsams like a place  
Where houses all are churches and have spires.  
I hadn't thought of them as Christmas trees.  
I doubt if I was tempted for a moment  
To sell them off their feet to go in cars  
And leave the slope behind the house all bare,  
Where the sun shines now no warmer than the moon.  
I'd hate to have them know it if I was.  
Yet more I'd hate to hold my trees except  
As others hold theirs or refuse for them,  
Beyond the time of profitable growth,  
The trial by market everything must come to.  
I dallied so much with the thought of selling.  
Then whether from mistaken courtesy

And fear of seeming short of speech, or whether  
From hope of hearing good of what was mine,  
I said, 'There aren't enough to be worth while.'

'I could soon tell how many they would cut,  
You let me look them over.'

'You could look.

But don't expect I'm going to let you have them.'  
Pasture they spring in, some in clumps too close  
That lop each other of boughs, but not a few  
Quite solitary and having equal boughs  
All round and round. The latter he nodded 'Yes' to,  
Or paused to say beneath some lovelier one,  
With a buyer's moderation, 'That would do.'  
I thought so too, but wasn't there to say so.  
We climbed the pasture on the south, crossed over,  
And came down on the north.

He said, 'A thousand.'

'A thousand Christmas trees!—at what apiece?'

He felt some need of softening that to me:  
'A thousand trees would come to thirty dollars.'

Then I was certain I had never meant  
To let him have them. Never show surprise!  
But thirty dollars seemed so small beside  
The extent of pasture I should strip, three cents

(For that was all they figured out apiece),  
Three cents so small beside the dollar friends  
I should be writing to within the hour  
Would pay in cities for good trees like those,  
Regular vestry-trees whole Sunday Schools  
Could hang enough on to pick off enough.  
A thousand Christmas trees I didn't know I had!  
Worth three cents more to give away than sell  
As may be shown by a simple calculation.  
Too bad I couldn't lay one in a letter.  
I can't help wishing I could send you one,  
In wishing you herewith a Merry Christmas.

## AN OLD MAN'S WINTER NIGHT

All out of doors looked darkly in at him  
Through the thin frost, almost in separate stars,  
That gathers on the pane in empty rooms.  
What kept his eyes from giving back the gaze  
Was the lamp tilted near them in his hand.  
What kept him from remembering the need  
That brought him to that creaking room was age.  
He stood with barrels round him—at a loss.  
And having scared the cellar under him  
In clomping there, he scared it once again  
In clomping off;—and scared the outer night,  
Which has its sounds, familiar, like the roar  
Of trees and crack of branches, common things,  
But nothing so like beating on a box.  
A light he was to no one but himself  
Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what,  
A quiet light, and then not even that.  
He consigned to the moon, such as she was,  
So late-arising, to the broken moon  
As better than the sun in any case  
For such a charge, his snow upon the roof,  
His icicles along the wall to keep;  
And slept. The log that shifted with a jolt  
Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,  
And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept.  
One aged man—one man—can't keep a house,



A farm, a countryside, or if he can,  
It's thus he does it of a winter night.

## THE TELEPHONE

‘When I was just as far as I could walk  
From here to-day,  
There was an hour  
All still  
When leaning with my head against a flower  
I heard you talk.  
Don’t say I didn’t, for I heard you say—  
You spoke from that flower on the window sill—  
Do you remember what it was you said?’

‘First tell me what it was you thought you heard.’

‘Having found the flower and driven a bee away,  
I leaned my head,  
And holding by the stalk,  
I listened and I thought I caught the word—  
What was it? Did you call me by my name?  
Or did you say—  
*Someone* said “Come”—I heard it as I bowed.’

‘I may have thought as much, but not aloud. ’

‘Well, so I came.’

## HYLA BROOK

By June our brook's run out of song and speed.  
Sought for much after that, it will be found  
Either to have gone groping underground  
(And taken with it all the Hyla breed  
That shouted in the mist a month ago,  
Like ghost of sleigh-bells in a ghost of snow)—  
Or flourished and come up in jewel-weed,  
Weak foliage that is blown upon and bent  
Even against the way its waters went.  
Its bed is left a faded paper sheet  
Of dead leaves stuck together by the heat—  
A brook to none but who remember long.  
This as it will be seen is other far  
Than with brooks taken elsewhere in song.  
We love the things we love for what they are.

## THE OVEN BIRD

There is a singer everyone has heard,  
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,  
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.  
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers  
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.  
He says the early petal-fall is past  
When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers  
On sunny days a moment overcast;  
And comes that other fall we name the fall.  
He says the highway dust is over all.  
The bird would cease and be as other birds  
But that he knows in singing not to sing.  
The question that he frames in all but words  
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

## BOND AND FREE

Love has earth to which she clings  
With hills and circling arms about—  
Wall within wall to shut fear out.  
But Thought has need of no such things,  
For Thought has a pair of dauntless wings.

On snow and sand and turf, I see  
Where Love has left a printed trace  
With straining in the world's embrace.  
And such is Love and glad to be.  
But Thought has shaken his ankles free.

Thought cleaves the interstellar gloom  
And sits in Sirius' disc all night,  
Till day makes him retrace his flight,  
With smell of burning on every plume,  
Back past the sun to an earthly room.

His gains in heaven are what they are.  
Yet some say Love by being thrall  
And simply staying possesses all  
In several beauty that Thought fares far  
To find fused in another star.

## BIRCHES

When I see birches bend to left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.  
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust—  
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.  
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
And they seem not to break; though once they are  
    bowed  
So low for long, they never right themselves:  
You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.  
But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm  
I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—  
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
Whose only play was what he found himself,

Summer or winter, and could play alone.  
One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again  
Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
And not one but hung limp, not one was left  
For him to conquer. He learned all there was  
To learn about not launching out too soon  
And so not carrying the tree away  
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,  
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.  
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.  
And so I dream of going back to be.  
It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.  
I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.  
May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk  
*Toward* heaven, till the tree could bear no more,

But dipped its top and set me down again.  
That would be good both going and coming back.  
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.



## PEA BRUSH

I walked down alone Sunday after church  
To the place where John has been cutting trees  
To see for myself about the birch  
He said I could have to bush my peas.

The sun in the new-cut narrow gap  
Was hot enough for the first of May,  
And stifling hot with the odor of sap  
From stumps still bleeding their life away.

The frogs that were peeping a thousand shrill  
Wherever the ground was low and wet,  
The minute they heard my step went still  
To watch me and see what I came to get.

Birch boughs enough piled everywhere!—  
All fresh and sound from the recent axe.  
Time someone came with cart and pair  
And got them off the wild flowers' backs.

They might be good for garden things  
To curl a little finger round,  
The same as you seize cat's-cradle strings,  
And lift themselves up off the ground.

Small good to anything growing wild,  
They were crooking many a trillium  
That had budded before the boughs were piled  
And since it was coming up had to come.

## PUTTING IN THE SEED

You come to fetch me from my work to-night  
When supper's on the table, and we'll see  
If I can leave off burying the white  
Soft petals fallen from the apple tree  
(Soft petals, yes, but not so barren quite,  
Mingled with these, smooth bean and wrinkled pea;)   
And go along with you ere you lose sight  
Of what you came for and become like me,  
Slave to a springtime passion for the earth.  
How Love burns through the Putting in the Seed  
On through the watching for that early birth  
When, just as the soil tarnishes with weed,

The sturdy seedling with arched body comes  
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs.

## A TIME TO TALK

When a friend calls to me from the road  
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,  
I don't stand still and look around  
On all the hills I haven't hoed,  
And shout from where I am, 'What is it?'  
No, not as there is a time to talk.  
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,  
Blade-end up and five feet tall,  
And plod: I go up to the stone wall  
For a friendly visit.

## THE COW IN APPLE TIME

Something inspires the only cow of late  
To make no more of a wall than an open gate,  
And think no more of wall-builders than fools.  
Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools  
A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit,  
She scorns a pasture withering to the root.  
She runs from tree to tree where lie and sweeten  
The windfalls spiked with stubble and worm-eaten.  
She leaves them bitten when she has to fly.  
She bellows on a knoll against the sky.  
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry.

## AN ENCOUNTER

Once on the kind of day called 'weather breeder,'  
When the heat slowly hazes and the sun  
By its own power seems to be undone,  
I was half boring through, half climbing through  
A swamp of cedar. Choked with oil of cedar  
And scurf of plants, and weary and over-heated,  
And sorry I ever left the road I knew,  
I paused and rested on a sort of hook  
That had me by the coat as good as seated,  
And since there was no other way to look,  
Looked up toward heaven, and there against the blue,  
Stood over me a resurrected tree,  
A tree that had been down and raised again—  
A barkless spectre. He had halted too,  
As if for fear of treading upon me.  
I saw the strange position of his hands—  
Up at his shoulders, dragging yellow strands  
Of wire with something in it from men to men.  
'You here?' I said. 'Where aren't you nowadays?  
And what's the news you carry—if you know?  
And tell me where you're off for—Montreal?  
Me? I'm not off for anywhere at all.  
Sometimes I wander out of beaten ways  
Half looking for the orchid Calypso.'

## RANGE-FINDING

The battle rent a cobweb diamond-strung  
And cut a flower beside a ground bird's nest  
Before it stained a single human breast.  
The stricken flower bent double and so hung.  
And still the bird revisited her young.  
A butterfly its fall had dispossessed  
A moment sought in air his flower of rest,  
Then lightly stooped to it and fluttering clung.

On the bare upland pasture there had spread  
O'ernight 'twixt mullein stalks a wheel of thread  
And straining cables wet with silver dew.  
A sudden passing bullet shook it dry.  
The indwelling spider ran to greet the fly,  
But finding nothing, sullenly withdrew.

## THE HILL WIFE

### LONELINESS

#### *Her Word*

One ought not to have to care  
So much as you and I  
Care when the birds come round the house  
To seem to say good-bye;

Or care so much when they come back  
With whatever it is they sing;  
The truth being we are as much  
Too glad for the one thing

As we are too sad for the other here—  
With birds that fill their breasts  
But with each other and themselves  
And their built or driven nests.

### HOUSE FEAR

Always—I tell you this they learned—  
Always at night when they returned  
To the lonely house from far away  
To lamps unlighted and fire gone gray,  
They learned to rattle the lock and key  
To give whatever might chance to be  
Warning and time to be off in flight:



And preferring the out- to the in-door night,  
They learned to leave the house-door wide  
Until they had lit the lamp inside.

## THE SMILE

### *Her Word*

I didn't like the way he went away.  
That smile! It never came of being gay.  
Still he smiled—did you see him?—I was sure!  
Perhaps because we gave him only bread  
And the wretch knew from that that we were poor,  
Perhaps because he let us give instead  
Of seizing from us as he might have seized.  
Perhaps he mocked at us for being wed,  
Or being very young (and he was pleased  
To have a vision of us old and dead).  
I wonder how far down the road he's got.  
He's watching from the woods as like as not.

## THE OFT-REPEATED DREAM

She had no saying dark enough  
For the dark pine that kept  
Forever trying the window-latch  
Of the room where they slept.

The tireless but ineffectual hands  
That with every futile pass

Made the great tree seem as a little bird  
Before the mystery of glass!

It never had been inside the room,  
And only one of the two  
Was afraid in an oft-repeated dream  
Of what the tree might do.

### THE IMPULSE

It was too lonely for her there,  
And too wild,  
And since there were but two of them,  
And no child,

And work was little in the house.  
She was free,  
And followed where he furrowed field,  
Or felled tree.

She rested on a log and tossed  
The fresh chips,  
With a song only to herself  
On her lips.

And once she went to break a bough  
Of black alder.  
She strayed so far she scarcely heard  
When he called her—

And didn't answer—didn't speak—  
Or return.  
She stood, and then she ran and hid  
In the fern.

He never found her, though he looked  
Everywhere,  
And he asked at her mother's house  
Was she there.

Sudden and swift and light as that  
The ties gave,  
And he learned of finalities  
Besides the grave.

## THE BONFIRE

'Oh, let's go up the hill and scare ourselves,  
As reckless as the best of them to-night,  
By setting fire to all the brush we piled  
With pitchy hands to wait for rain or snow.  
Oh, let's not wait for rain to make it safe.  
The pile is ours: we dragged it bough on bough  
Down dark converging paths between the pines.  
Let's not care what we do with it to-night.  
Divide it? No! But burn it as one pile  
The way we piled it. And let's be the talk  
Of people brought to windows by a light  
Thrown from somewhere against their wall-paper.  
Rouse them all, both the free and not so free  
With saying what they'd like to do to us  
For what they'd better wait till we have done.  
Let's all but bring to life this old volcano,  
If that is what the mountain ever was—  
And scare ourselves. Let wild fire loose we will . . .'

'And scare you too?' the children said together.

'Why wouldn't it scare me to have a fire  
Begin in smudge with ropy smoke and know  
That still, if I repent, I may recall it,  
But in a moment not: a little spurt  
Of burning fatness, and then nothing but  
The fire itself can put it out, and that

By burning out, and before it burns out  
It will have roared first and mixed sparks with stars,  
And sweeping round it with a flaming sword,  
Made the dim trees stand back in wider circle—  
Done so much and I know not how much more  
I mean it shall not do if I can bind it.  
Well if it doesn't with its draft bring on  
A wind to blow in earnest from some quarter,  
As once it did with me upon an April.  
The breezes were so spent with winter blowing  
They seemed to fail the bluebirds under them  
Short of the perch their languid flight was toward,  
And my flame made a pinnacle to heaven  
As I walked once around it in possession.  
But the wind out of doors—you know the saying.  
There came a gust. You used to think the trees  
Made wind by fanning since you never knew  
It blow but that you saw the trees in motion.  
Something or someone watching made that gust.  
It put the flame tip-down and dabbed the grass  
Of over-winter with the least tip-touch  
Your tongue gives salt or sugar in your hand.  
The place it reached to blackened instantly.  
The black was almost all there was by day-light,  
That and the merest curl of cigarette smoke—  
And a flame slender as the hepaticas,  
Blood-root, and violets so soon to be now.  
But the black spread like black death on the ground,  
And I think the sky darkened with a cloud  
Like winter and evening coming on together.

They were enough things to be thought of then.  
Where the field stretches toward the north  
And setting sun to Hyla brook, I gave it  
To flames without twice thinking, where it verges  
Upon the road, to flames too, though in fear  
They might find fuel there, in withered brake,  
Grass its full length, old silver golden-rod,  
And alder and grape vine entanglement,  
To leap the dusty deadline. For my own  
I took what front there was beside. I knelt  
And thrust hands in and held my face away.  
Fight such a fire by rubbing not by beating.  
A board is the best weapon if you have it.  
I had my coat. And oh, I knew, I knew,  
And said out loud, I couldn't bide the smother  
And heat so close in; but the thought of all  
The woods and town on fire by me, and all  
The town turned out to fight for me—that held me.  
I trusted the brook barrier, but feared  
The road would fail; and on that side the fire  
Died not without a noise of crackling wood—  
Of something more than tinder-grass and weed—  
That brought me to my feet to hold it back  
By leaning back myself, as if the reins  
Were round my neck and I was at the plough.  
I won! But I'm sure no one ever spread  
Another color over a tenth the space  
That I spread coal-black over in the time  
It took me. Neighbors coming home from town  
Couldn't believe that so much black had come there

While they had backs turned, that it hadn't been there  
When they had passed an hour or so before  
Going the other way and they not seen it.  
They looked about for someone to have done it.  
But there was no one. I was somewhere wondering  
Where all my weariness had gone and why  
I walked so light on air in heavy shoes  
In spite of a scorched Fourth-of-July feeling.  
Why wouldn't I be scared remembering that?

'If it scares you, what will it do to us?'

'Scare you. But if you shrink from being scared,  
What would you say to war if it should come?  
That's what for reasons I should like to know—  
If you can comfort me by any answer.'

'Oh, but war's not for children—it's for men.'

'Now we are digging almost down to China.  
My dears, my dears, you thought that—we all thought  
it.

So your mistake was ours. Haven't you heard, though,  
About the ships where war has found them out  
At sea, about the towns where war has come  
Through opening clouds at night with droning speed  
Further o'erhead than all but stars and angels,—  
And children in the ships and in the towns?  
Haven't you heard what we have lived to learn?  
Nothing so new—something we had forgotten:

*War is for everyone, for children too.*  
I wasn't going to tell you and I mustn't.  
The best way is to come up hill with me  
And have our fire and laugh and be afraid.'



# THE LAST WORD OF A BLUEBIRD

## AS TOLD TO A CHILD

As I went out a Crow  
In a low voice said 'Oh,  
I was looking for you.  
How do you do?  
I just came to tell you  
To tell Lesley (will you?)  
That her little Bluebird  
Wanted me to bring word  
That the north wind last night  
That made the stars bright  
And made ice on the trough  
Almost made him cough  
His tail feathers off.  
He just had to fly!  
But he sent her Good-bye,  
And said to be good,  
And wear her red hood,  
And look for skunk tracks  
In the snow with an axe—  
And do everything!  
And perhaps in the spring  
He would come back and sing.'

‘OUT, OUT—’

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard  
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of  
wood,

Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.  
And from there those that lifted eyes could count  
Five mountain ranges one behind the other  
Under the sunset far into Vermont.

And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,  
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.

And nothing happened: day was all but done.

Call it a day, I wish they might have said  
To please the boy by giving him the half hour  
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.

His sister stood beside them in her apron  
To tell them ‘Supper.’ At the word, the saw,  
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,  
Leaped out at the boy’s hand, or seemed to leap—  
He must have given the hand. However it was,  
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!

The boy’s first outcry was a rueful laugh,  
As he swung toward them holding up the hand  
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep  
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all—  
Since he was old enough to know, big boy  
Doing a man’s work, though a child at heart—  
He saw all spoiled. ‘Don’t let him cut my hand off—  
The doctor, when he comes. Don’t let him, sister!’

So. But the hand was gone already.  
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.  
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.  
And then—the watcher at his pulse took fright.  
No one believed. They listened at his heart.  
Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.  
No more to build on there. And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

BROWN'S DESCENT  
OR  
THE WILLY-NILLY SLIDE

Brown lived at such a lofty farm  
That everyone for miles could see  
His lantern when he did his chores  
In winter after half-past three.

And many must have seen him make  
His wild descent from there one night,  
'Cross lots, 'cross walls, 'cross everything,  
Describing rings of lantern light.

Between the house and barn the gale  
Got him by something he had on  
And blew him out on the icy crust  
That cased the world, and he was gone!

Walls were all buried, trees were few:  
He saw no stay unless he stove  
A hole in somewhere with his heel.  
But though repeatedly he strove

And stamped and said things to himself,  
And sometimes something seemed to yield,  
He gained no foothold, but pursued  
His journey down from field to field.

Sometimes he came with arms outspread  
Like wings, revolving in the scene  
Upon his longer axis, and  
With no small dignity of mien.

Faster or slower as he chanced,  
Sitting or standing as he chose,  
According as he feared to risk  
His neck, or thought to spare his clothes,

He never let the lantern drop.  
And some exclaimed who saw afar  
The figures he described with it,  
'I wonder what those signals are

Brown makes at such an hour of night!  
He's celebrating something strange.  
I wonder if he's sold his farm,  
Or been made Master of the Grange.'

He reeled, he lurched, he bobbed, he checked;  
He fell and made the lantern rattle  
(But saved the light from going out.)  
So half-way down he fought the battle,

Incredulous of his own bad luck.  
And then becoming reconciled  
To everything, he gave it up  
And came down like a coasting child.

‘Well—I—be—’ that was all he said,  
As standing in the river road,  
He looked back up the slippery slope  
(Two miles it was) to his abode.

Sometimes as an authority  
On motor-cars, I’m asked if I  
Should say our stock was petered out,  
And this is my sincere reply:

Yankees are what they always were.  
Don’t think Brown ever gave up hope  
Of getting home again because  
He couldn’t climb that slippery slope;

Or even thought of standing there  
Until the January thaw  
Should take the polish off the crust.  
He bowed with grace to natural law,

And then went round it on his feet,  
After the manner of our stock;  
Not much concerned for those to whom,  
At that particular time o’clock,

It must have looked as if the course  
He steered was really straight away  
From that which he was headed for—  
Not much concerned for them, I say;

No more so than became a man—  
    *And* politician at odd seasons.  
I've kept Brown standing in the cold  
    While I invested him with reasons;

But now he snapped his eyes three times;  
    Then shook his lantern, saying, 'He's  
'Bout out!' and took the long way home  
    By road, a matter of several miles.

## THE GUM-GATHERER

There overtook me and drew me in  
To his down-hill, early-morning stride,  
And set me five miles on my road  
Better than if he had had me ride,  
A man with a swinging bag for load  
And half the bag wound round his hand.  
We talked like barking above the din  
Of water we walked along beside.  
And for my telling him where I'd been  
And where I lived in mountain land  
To be coming home the way I was,  
He told me a little about himself.  
He came from higher up in the pass  
Where the grist of the new-beginning brooks  
Is blocks split off the mountain mass—  
And hopeless grist enough it looks  
Ever to grind to soil for grass.  
(The way it is will do for moss.)  
There he had built his stolen shack.  
It had to be a stolen shack  
Because of the fears of fire and loss  
That trouble the sleep of lumber folk:  
Visions of half the world burned black  
And the sun shrunken yellow in smoke.  
We know who when they come to town  
Bring berries under the wagon seat,  
Or a basket of eggs between their feet;



What this man brought in a cotton sack  
Was gum, the gum of the mountain spruce.  
He showed me lumps of the scented stuff  
Like uncut jewels, dull and rough.  
It comes to market golden brown;  
But turns to pink between the teeth.

I told him this is a pleasant life  
To set your breast to the bark of trees  
That all your days are dim beneath,  
And reaching up with a little knife,  
To loose the resin and take it down  
And bring it to market when you please.

## THE LINE-GANG

Here come the line-gang pioneering by.  
They throw a forest down less cut than broken.  
They plant dead trees for living, and the dead  
They string together with a living thread.  
They string an instrument against the sky  
Wherein words whether beaten out or spoken  
Will run as hushed as when they were a thought.  
But in no hush they string it: they go past  
With shouts afar to pull the cable taut,  
To hold it hard until they make it fast,  
To ease away—they have it. With a laugh,  
An oath of towns that set the wild at naught  
They bring the telephone and telegraph.

## THE VANISHING RED

He is said to have been the last Red Man  
In Acton. And the Miller is said to have laughed—  
If you like to call such a sound a laugh.  
But he gave no one else a laughter's license.  
For he turned suddenly grave as if to say,  
'Whose business,—if I take it on myself,  
Whose business—but why talk round the barn?—  
When it's just that I hold with getting a thing done  
with.  
You can't get back and see it as he saw it.  
It's too long a story to go into now.  
You'd have to have been there and lived it.  
Then you wouldn't have looked on it as just a matter  
Of who began it between the two races.

Some guttural exclamation of surprise  
The Red Man gave in poking about the mill  
Over the great big thumping shuffling mill-stone  
Disgusted the Miller physically as coming  
From one who had no right to be heard from.  
'Come, John,' he said, 'you want to see the wheel pit?'

He took him down below a cramping rafter,  
And showed him, through a manhole in the floor,  
The water in desperate straits like frantic fish,  
Salmon and sturgeon, lashing with their tails.  
Then he shut down the trap door with a ring in it

That jangled even above the general noise,  
And came up stairs alone—and gave that laugh,  
And said something to a man with a meal-sack  
That the man with the meal-sack didn't catch—then.  
Oh, yes, he showed John the wheel pit all right.

## SNOW

The three stood listening to a fresh access  
Of wind that caught against the house a moment,  
Gulped snow, and then blew free again—the Coles  
Dressed, but dishevelled from some hours of sleep,  
Meserve belittled in the great skin coat he wore.

Meserve was first to speak. He pointed backward  
Over his shoulder with his pipe-stem, saying,  
'You can just see it glancing off the roof  
Making a great scroll upward toward the sky,  
Long enough for recording all our names on.—  
I think I'll just call up my wife and tell her  
I'm here—so far—and starting on again.  
I'll call her softly so that if she's wise  
And gone to sleep, she needn't wake to answer.'  
Three times he barely stirred the bell, then listened.  
'Why, Lett, still up? Lett, I'm at Cole's. I'm late. .  
I called you up to say Good-night from here  
Before I went to say Good-morning there.—  
I thought I would.—I know, but, Lett—I know—  
I could, but what's the sense? The rest won't be  
So bad.—Give me an hour for it.—Ho, ho,  
Three hours to here! But that was all up hill;  
The rest is down.—Why no, no, not a wallow:  
They kept their heads and took their time to it  
Like darlings, both of them. They're in the barn.—

My dear, I'm coming just the same. I didn't  
Call you to ask you to invite me home.—'  
He lingered for some word she wouldn't say,  
Said it at last himself, 'Good-night,' and then  
Getting no answer, closed the telephone.  
The three stood in the lamplight round the table  
With lowered eyes a moment till he said,  
'I'll just see how the horses are.'

'Yes, do,'

Both the Coles said together. Mrs. Cole  
Added: 'You can judge better after seeing.—  
I want you here with me, Fred. Leave him here,  
Brother Meserve. You know to find your way  
Out through the shed.'

'I guess I know my way,

I guess I know where I can find my name  
Carved in the shed to tell me who I am  
If it don't tell me where I am. I used  
To play—'

'You tend your horses and come back.

Fred Cole, you're going to let him!'

'Well, aren't you:

How can you help yourself?'

'I called him Brother.

Why did I call him that?'

‘It’s right enough.  
That’s all you ever heard him called round here.  
He seems to have lost off his Christian name.’

‘Christian enough I should call that myself.  
He took no notice, did he? Well, at least  
I didn’t use it out of love of him,  
The dear knows. I detest the thought of him  
With his ten children under ten years old.  
I hate his wretched little Racker Sect,  
All’s ever I heard of it, which isn’t much.  
But that’s not saying—Look, Fred Cole, it’s twelve,  
Isn’t it, now? He’s been here half an hour.  
He says he left the village store at nine.  
Three hours to do four miles—a mile an hour  
Or not much better. Why, it doesn’t seem  
As if a man could move that slow and move.  
Try to think what he did with all that time.  
And three miles more to go!’

‘Don’t let him go.  
Stick to him, Helen. Make him answer you.  
That sort of man talks straight on all his life  
From the last thing he said himself, stone deaf  
To anything anyone else may say.  
I should have thought, though, you could make him  
hear you.’

‘What is he doing out a night like this?  
Why can’t he stay at home?’

‘He had to preach.’

‘It’s no night to be out.’

‘He may be small,  
He may be good, but one thing’s sure, he’s tough.’

‘And strong of stale tobacco.’

‘He’ll pull through.’

‘You only say so. Not another house  
Or shelter to put into from this place  
To theirs. I’m going to call his wife again.’

‘Wait and he may. Let’s see what he will do.  
Let’s see if he will think of her again.  
But then I doubt he’s thinking of himself.  
He doesn’t look on it as anything.’

‘He shan’t go—there!’

‘It is a night, my dear.’

‘One thing: he didn’t drag God into it.’

‘He don’t consider it a case for God.’

‘You think so, do you? You don’t know the kind.  
He’s getting up a miracle this minute.’



Privately—to himself, right now, he's thinking  
He'll make a case of it if he succeeds,  
But keep still if he fails.'

'Keep still all over.  
He'll be dead—dead and buried.'

'Such a trouble!  
Not but I've every reason not to care  
What happens to him if it only takes  
Some of the sanctimonious conceit  
Out of one of those pious scalawags.'

'Nonsense to that! You want to see him safe.'

'You like the runt.'

'Don't you a little?'

'Well,  
I don't like what he's doing, which is what  
You like, and like him for.'

'Oh, yes you do.  
You like your fun as well as anyone;  
Only you women have to put these airs on  
To impress men. You've got us so ashamed  
Of being men we can't look at a good fight  
Between two boys and not feel bound to stop it.  
Let the man freeze an ear or two, I say.—

He's here. I leave him all to you. Go in  
And save his life.—All right, come in, Meserve.  
Sit down, sit down. How did you find the horses?’

‘Fine, fine.’

‘And ready for some more? My wife here  
Says it won't do. You've got to give it up.’

‘Won't you to please me? Please! If I say please?  
Mr. Meserve, I'll leave it to *your* wife.  
What *did* your wife say on the telephone?’

Meserve seemed to heed nothing but the lamp  
Or something not far from it on the table.  
By straightening out and lifting a forefinger,  
He pointed with his hand from where it lay  
Like a white crumpled spider on his knee:  
‘That leaf there in your open book! It moved  
Just then, I thought. It's stood erect like that,  
There on the table, ever since I came,  
Trying to turn itself backward or forward,  
I've had my eye on it to make out which;  
If forward, then it's with a friend's impatience—  
You see I know—to get you on to things  
It wants to see how you will take, if backward  
It's from regret for something you have passed  
And failed to see the good of. Never mind,  
Things must expect to come in front of us  
A many times—I don't say just how many—

That varies with the things—before we see them.  
One of the lies would make it out that nothing  
Ever presents itself before us twice.  
‘Where would we be at last if that were so?  
Our very life depends on everything’s  
Recurring till we answer from within.  
The thousandth time may prove the charm.—That  
leaf!

It can’t turn either way. It needs the wind’s help.  
But the wind didn’t move it if it moved.  
It moved itself. The wind’s at naught in here.  
It couldn’t stir so sensitively poised  
A thing as that. It couldn’t reach the lamp  
To get a puff of black smoke from the flame,  
Or blow a rumple in the collie’s coat.  
You make a little foursquare block of air,  
Quiet and light and warm, in spite of all  
The illimitable dark and cold and storm,  
And by so doing give these three, lamp, dog,  
And book-leaf, that keep near you, their repose;  
‘Though for all anyone can tell, repose  
May be the thing you haven’t, yet you give it.  
So false it is that what we haven’t we can’t give;  
So false, that what we always say is true.  
I’ll have to turn the leaf if no one else will.  
It won’t lie down. Then let it stand. Who cares?’

‘I shouldn’t want to hurry you, Meserve,  
But if you’re going—Say you’ll stay, you know.  
But let me raise this curtain on a scene,

And show you how it's piling up against you.  
You see the snow-white through the white of frost?  
Ask Helen how far up the sash it's climbed  
Since last we read the gage.'

'It looks as if  
Some pallid thing had squashed its features flat  
And its eyes shut with overeagerness  
To see what people found so interesting  
In one another, and had gone to sleep  
Of its own stupid lack of understanding,  
Or broken its white neck of mushroom stuff  
Short off, and died against the window-pane.'

'Brother Meserve, take care, you'll scare yourself  
More than you will us with such nightmare talk.  
It's you it matters to, because it's you  
Who have to go out into it alone.'

'Let him talk, Helen, and perhaps he'll stay.'

'Before you drop the curtain—I'm reminded:  
You recollect the boy who came out here  
To breathe the air one winter—had a room  
Down at the Averys'? Well, one sunny morning  
After a downy storm, he passed our place  
And found me banking up the house with snow.  
And I was burrowing in deep for warmth,  
Piling it well above the window-sills.  
The snow against the window caught his eye.

“Hey, that’s a pretty thought”—those were his words.

“So you can think it’s six feet deep outside,  
While you sit warm and read up balanced rations.  
You can’t get too much winter in the winter.”

Those were his words. And he went home and all  
But banked the daylight out of Avery’s windows.

Now you and I would go to no such length.

At the same time you can’t deny it makes

It not a mite worse, sitting here, we three,

Playing our fancy, to have the snowline run

So high across the pane outside. There where

There is a sort of tunnel in the frost

More like a tunnel than a hole—way down

At the far end of it you see a stir

And quiver like the frayed edge of the drift

Blown in the wind. I *like* that—I like *that*.

Well, now I leave you, people.’

‘Come, Meserve,

We thought you were deciding not to go—

The ways you found to say the praise of comfort

And being where you are. You want to stay.’

‘I’ll own it’s cold for such a fall of snow.

This house is frozen brittle, all except

This room you sit in. If you think the wind

Sounds further off, it’s not because it’s dying;

You’re further under in the snow—that’s all—

And feel it less. Hear the soft bombs of dust

It bursts against us at the chimney mouth,  
And at the eaves. I like it from inside  
More than I shall out in it. But the horses  
Are rested and it's time to say good-night,  
And let you get to bed again. Good-night,  
Sorry I had to break in on your sleep.'

'Lucky for you you did. Lucky for you  
You had us for a half-way station  
To stop at. If you were the kind of man  
Paid heed to women, you'd take my advice  
And for your family's sake stay where you are.  
But what good is my saying it over and over?  
You've done more than you had a-right to think  
You could do—*now*. You know the risk you take  
In going on.'

'Our snow-storms as a rule  
Aren't looked on as man-killers, and although  
I'd rather be the beast that sleeps the sleep  
Under it all, his door sealed up and lost,  
Than the man fighting it to keep above it,  
Yet think of the small birds at roost and not  
In nests. Shall I be counted less than they are?  
Their bulk in water would be frozen rock  
In no time out to-night. And yet to-morrow  
They will come budding boughs from tree to tree  
Flirting their wings and saying Chickadee,  
As if not knowing what you meant by the word  
storm.'

'But why when no one wants you to go on?  
Your wife—she doesn't want you to. We don't,  
And you yourself don't want to. Who else is there?'

'Save us from being cornered by a woman.  
Well, there's'—She told Fred afterward that in  
The pause right there, she thought the dreaded word  
Was coming, 'God.' But no, he only said  
'Well, there's—the storm. That says I must go on.  
That wants me as a war might if it came.  
Ask any man.'

He threw her that as something  
To last her till he got outside the door.  
He had Cole with him to the barn to see him off.  
When Cole returned he found his wife still standing  
Beside the table near the open book,  
Not reading it.

'Well, what kind of a man  
Do you call that?' she said.

'He had the gift  
Of words, or is it tongues, I ought to say?'

'Was ever such a man for seeing likeness?'

'Or disregarding people's civil questions—  
What? We've found out in one hour more about him  
Than we had seeing him pass by in the road

A thousand times. If that's the way he preaches!  
You didn't think you'd keep him after all.  
Oh, I'm not blaming you. He didn't leave you  
Much say in the matter, and I'm just as glad  
We're not in for a night of him. No sleep  
If he had stayed. The least thing set him going.  
It's quiet as an empty church without him.'

'But how much better off are we as it is?  
We'll have to sit here till we know he's safe.'

'Yes, I suppose you'll want to, but I shouldn't.  
He knows what he can do, or he wouldn't try.  
Get into bed I say, and get some rest.  
He won't come back, and if he telephones,  
It won't be for an hour or two.'

'Well then.

We can't be any help by sitting here  
And living his fight through with him, I suppose.'

\* \* \*

Cole had been telephoning in the dark.  
Mrs. Cole's voice came from an inner room:  
'Did she call you or you call her?'

'She me.

You'd better dress: you won't go back to bed.  
We must have been asleep: it's three and after.'



‘Had she been ringing long? I’ll get my wrapper.  
I want to speak to her.’

‘All she said was,  
He hadn’t come and had he really started.’

‘She knew he had, poor thing, two hours ago.’

‘He had the shovel. He’ll have made a fight.’

‘Why did I ever let him leave this house!’

‘Don’t begin that. You did the best you could  
To keep him—though perhaps you didn’t quite  
Conceal a wish to see him show the spunk  
To disobey you. Much his wife’ll thank you.’

‘Fred, after all I said! You shan’t make out  
That it was any way but what it was.  
Did she let on by any word she said  
She didn’t thank me?’

‘When I told her “Gone,”  
“Well then,” she said, and “Well then”—like a threat.  
And then her voice came scraping slow: “Oh, you,  
Why did you let him go?”’

‘Asked why we let him?  
You let me there. I’ll ask her why she let him.

She didn't dare to speak when he was here.  
Their number's—twenty-one? The thing won't work.  
Someone's receiver's down. The handle stumbles.  
The stubborn thing, the way it jars your arm!  
It's theirs. She's dropped it from her hand and gone.'

'Try speaking. Say "Hello!"'

'Hello. Hello.'

'What do you hear?'

'I hear an empty room—  
You know—it sounds that way. And yes, I hear—  
I think I hear a clock—and windows rattling.  
No step though. If she's there she's sitting down.'

'Shout, she may hear you.'

'Shouting is no good.'

'Keep speaking then.'

'Hello. Hello. Hello.  
You don't suppose—? She wouldn't go out doors?'

'I'm half afraid that's just what she might do.'

'And leave the children?'

‘Wait and call again.  
You can’t hear whether she has left the door  
Wide open and the wind’s blown out the lamp  
And the fire’s died and the room’s dark and cold?’

‘One of two things, either she’s gone to bed  
Or gone out doors.’

‘In which case both are lost.  
Do you know what she’s like? Have you ever met her?  
It’s strange she doesn’t want to speak to us.’

‘Fred, see if you can hear what I hear. Come.’

‘A clock maybe.’

‘Don’t you hear something else?’

‘Not talking.’

‘No.’

‘Why, yes, I hear—what is it?’

‘What do you say it is?’

‘A baby’s crying!  
Frantic it sounds, though muffled and far off.  
Its mother wouldn’t let it cry like that,  
Not if she’s there.’

‘What do you make of it?’

‘There’s only one thing possible to make,  
That is, assuming—that she has gone out.  
Of course she hasn’t though.’ They both sat down  
Helpless. ‘There’s nothing we can do till morning.’

‘Fred, I shan’t let you think of going out.’

‘Hold on.’ The double bell began to chirp.  
They started up. Fred took the telephone.  
‘Hello, Meserve. You’re there, then!—And your wife?  
Good! Why I asked—she didn’t seem to answer.  
He says she went to let him in the barn.—  
We’re glad. Oh, say no more about it, man.  
Drop in and see us when you’re passing.’

‘Well,  
She has him then, though what she wants him for  
I *don’t* see.’

‘Possibly not for herself.  
Maybe she only wants him for the children.’

‘The whole to-do seems to have been for nothing.  
What spoiled our night was to him just his fun.  
What did he come in for?—To talk and visit?  
Thought he’d just call to tell us it was snowing.  
If he thinks he is going to make our house  
A half-way coffee house ’twixt town and nowhere—’

‘I thought you’d feel you’d been too much concerned.’

‘You think you haven’t been concerned yourself.’

‘If you mean he was inconsiderate  
To rout us out to think for him at midnight  
And then take our advice no more than nothing,  
Why, I agree with you. But let’s forgive him.  
We’ve had a share in one night of his life.  
What’ll you bet he ever calls again?’

## THE SOUND OF THE TREES

I wonder about the trees.  
Why do we wish to bear  
Forever the noise of these  
More than another noise  
So close to our dwelling place?  
We suffer them by the day  
Till we lose all measure of pace,  
And fixity in our joys,  
And acquire a listening air.  
They are that that talks of going  
But never gets away;  
And that talks no less for knowing,  
As it grows wiser and older,  
That now it means to stay.  
My feet tug at the floor  
And my head sways to my shoulder  
Sometimes when I watch trees sway,  
From the window or the door.  
I shall set forth for somewhere,  
I shall make the reckless choice  
Some day when they are in voice  
And tossing so as to scare  
The white clouds over them on.  
I shall have less to say,  
But I shall be gone.



*New Hampshire*





## NEW HAMPSHIRE

I met a lady from the South who said  
(You won't believe she said it, but she said it):  
'None of my family ever worked, or had  
A thing to sell.' I don't suppose the work  
Much matters. You may work for all of me.  
I've seen the time I've had to work myself.  
The having anything to sell is what  
Is the disgrace in man or state or nation.

I met a traveller from Arkansas  
Who boasted of his state as beautiful  
For diamonds and apples. 'Diamonds  
And apples in commercial quantities?'  
I asked him, on my guard. 'Oh yes,' he answered,  
Off his. The time was evening in the Pullman.  
'I see the porter's made your bed,' I told him.

I met a Californian who would  
Talk California—a state so blessed,  
He said, in climate, none had ever died there  
A natural death, and Vigilance Committees  
Had had to organize to stock the graveyards  
And vindicate the state's humanity.  
'Just the way Steffanson runs on,' I murmured,  
'About the British Arctic. That's what comes  
Of being in the market with a climate.'

I met a poet from another state,  
A zealot full of fluid inspiration,  
Who in the name of fluid inspiration,  
But in the best style of bad salesmanship,  
Angrily tried to make me write a protest  
(In verse I think) against the Volstead Act.  
He didn't even offer me a drink  
Until I asked for one to steady *him*.  
This is called having an idea to sell.

It never could have happened in New Hampshire.

The only person really soiled with trade  
I ever stumbled on in old New Hampshire  
Was someone who had just come back ashamed  
From selling things in California.  
He'd built a noble mansard roof with balls  
On turrets like Constantinople, deep  
In woods some ten miles from a railroad station,  
As if to put forever out of mind  
The hope of being, as we say, received.  
I found him standing at the close of day  
Inside the threshold of his open barn,  
Like a lone actor on a gloomy stage—  
And recognized him through the iron grey  
In which his face was muffled to the eyes  
As an old boyhood friend, and once indeed  
A drover with me on the road to Brighton.  
His farm was 'grounds,' and not a farm at all;  
His house among the local sheds and shanties

Rose like a factor's at a trading station.  
And he was rich, and I was still a rascal.  
I couldn't keep from asking impolitely,  
Where had he been and what had he been doing?  
How did he get so? (Rich was understood.)  
In dealing in 'old rags' in San Francisco.  
Oh it was terrible as well could be.  
We both of us turned over in our graves.  
Just specimens is all New Hampshire has,  
One each of everything as in a show-case  
Which naturally she doesn't care to sell

She had one President (pronounce him Purse,  
And make the most of it for better or worse.  
He's your one chance to score against the state).  
She had one Daniel Webster. He was all  
The Daniel Webster ever was or shall be.  
She had the Dartmouth needed to produce him.

I call her old. She has one family  
Whose claim is good to being settled here  
Before the era of colonization,  
And before that of exploration even.  
John Smith remarked them as he coasted by  
Dangling their legs and fishing off a wharf  
At the Isles of Shoals, and satisfied himself  
They weren't Red Indians, but veritable  
Pre-primitives of the white race, dawn people,  
Like those who furnished Adam's sons with  
wives;

However uninnocent they may have been  
In being there so early in our history.  
They'd been there then a hundred years or more.  
Pity he didn't ask what they were up to  
At that date with a wharf already built,  
And take their name. They've since told me their  
name—

Today an honored one in Nottingham.  
As for what they were up to more than fishing—  
Suppose they weren't behaving Puritanly,  
The hour had not yet struck for being good,  
Mankind had not yet gone on the Sabbatical.  
It became an explorer of the deep  
Not to explore too deep in others' business.  
Did you but know of him, New Hampshire has  
One real reformer who would change the world  
So it would be accepted by two classes,  
Artists the minute they set up as artists,  
Before, that is, they are themselves accepted,  
And boys the minute they get out of college.  
I can't help thinking those are tests to go by.

And she has one I don't know what to call him,  
Who comes from Philadelphia every year  
With a great flock of chickens of rare breeds  
He wants to give the educational  
Advantages of growing almost wild  
Under the watchful eye of hawk and eagle—  
Dorkings because they're spoken of by Chaucer,  
Sussex because they're spoken of by Herrick.

She has a touch of gold. New Hampshire gold—  
You may have heard of it. I had a farm  
Offered me not long since up Berlin way  
With a mine on it that was worked for gold;  
But not gold in commercial quantities.  
Just enough gold to make the engagement rings  
And marriage rings of those who owned the farm.  
What gold more innocent could one have asked for?  
One of my children ranging after rocks  
Lately brought home from Andover or Canaan  
A specimen of beryl with a trace  
Of radium. I know with radium  
The trace would have to be the merest trace  
To be below the threshold of commercial;  
But trust New Hampshire not to have enough  
Of radium or anything to sell.  
A specimen of everything, I said.  
She has one witch—old style. She lives in Colebrook.  
(The only other witch I ever met  
Was lately at a cut-glass dinner in Boston.  
There were four candles and four people present.  
The witch was young, and beautiful (new style),  
And open-minded. She was free to question  
Her gift for reading letters locked in boxes.  
Why was it so much greater when the boxes  
Were metal than it was when they were wooden?  
It made the world seem so mysterious.  
The S'ciety for Psychical Research  
Was cognizant. Her husband was worth millions.  
I think he owned some shares in Harvard College.)

New Hampshire *used* to have at Salem  
A company we called the White Corpuscles,  
Whose duty was at any hour of night  
To rush in sheets and fools' caps where they smelled  
A thing the least bit doubtfully perscented  
And give someone the Skipper Ireson's Ride.

One each of everything as in a show-case.  
More than enough land for a specimen  
You'll say she has, but there there enters in  
Something else to protect her from herself.  
There quality makes up for quantity.  
Not even New Hampshire farms are much for sale.  
The farm I made my home on in the mountains  
I had to take by force rather than buy.  
I caught the owner outdoors by himself  
Raking up after winter, and I said,  
'I'm going to put you off this farm: I want it.'  
'Where are you going to put me? In the road?'  
'I'm going to put you on the farm next to it.'  
'Why won't the farm next to it do for you?'  
'I like this better.' It was really better.

Apples? New Hampshire has them, but unsprayed,  
With no suspicion in stem-end or blossom-end  
Of vitriol or arsenate of lead,  
And so not good for anything but cider.  
Her unpruned grapes are flung like lariats  
Far up the birches out of reach of man.

A state producing precious metals, stones,  
And—writing; none of these except perhaps  
The precious literature in quantity  
Or quality to worry the producer  
About disposing of it. Do you know,  
Considering the market, there are more  
Poems produced than any other thing?  
No wonder poets sometimes have to *seem*  
So much more business-like than business men.  
Their wares are so much harder to get rid of.

She's one of the two best states in the Union.  
Vermont's the other. And the two have been  
Yoke-fellows in the sap-yoke from of old  
In many Marches. And they lie like wedges,  
Thick end to thin end and thin end to thick end,  
And are a figure of the way the strong  
Of mind and strong of arm should fit together,  
One thick where one is thin and vice versa.  
New Hampshire raises the Connecticut  
In a trout hatchery near Canada,  
But soon divides the river with Vermont.  
Both are delightful states for their absurdly  
Small towns—Lost Nation, Bungey, Muddy Boo,  
Poplin, Still Corners (so called not because  
The place is silent all day long, nor yet  
Because it boasts a whisky still—because  
It set out once to be a city and still  
Is only corners, cross-roads in a wood).



And I remember one whose name appeared  
Between the pictures on a movie screen  
Election night once in Franconia,  
When everything had gone Republican  
And Democrats were sore in need of comfort:  
Easton goes Democratic, Wilson 4  
Hughes 2. And everybody to the saddest  
Laughed the loud laugh, the big laugh at the little.  
New York (five million) laughs at Manchester,  
Manchester (sixty or seventy thousand) laughs  
At Littleton (four thousand), Littleton  
Laughs at Franconia (seven hundred), and  
Franconia laughs, I fear,—did laugh that night—  
At Easton. What has Easton left to laugh at,  
And like the actress exclaim, 'Oh my God' at?  
There's Bungey; and for Bungey there are towns,  
Whole townships named but without population.

Anything I can say about New Hampshire  
Will serve almost as well about Vermont,  
Excepting that they differ in their mountains.  
The Vermont mountains stretch extended straight;  
New Hampshire mountains curl up in a coil.

I had been coming to New Hampshire mountains.  
And here I am and what am I to say?  
Here first my theme becomes embarrassing.  
Emerson said, 'The God who made New Hampshire  
Taunted the lofty land with little men.'  
Another Massachusetts poet said,

'I go no more to summer in New Hampshire.  
I've given up my summer place in Dublin.'  
But when I asked to know what ailed New Hampshire,  
She said she couldn't stand the people in it,  
The little men (it's Massachusetts speaking).  
And when I asked to know what ailed the people,  
She said, 'Go read your own books and find out.'  
I may as well confess myself the author  
Of several books against the world in general.  
To take them as against a special state  
Or even nation's to restrict my meaning.  
I'm what is called a sensiblist,  
Or otherwise an environmentalist.  
I refuse to adapt myself a mite  
To any change from hot to cold, from wet  
To dry, from poor to rich, or back again.  
I make a virtue of my suffering  
From nearly everything that goes on round me.  
In other words, I know wherever I am,  
Being the creature of literature I am,  
I shall not lack for pain to keep me awake.  
Kit Marlowe taught me how to say my prayers:  
'Why, this is Hell, nor am I out of it.'  
Samoa, Russia, Ireland I complain of,  
No less than England, France and Italy.  
Because I wrote my novels in New Hampshire  
Is no proof that I aimed them at New Hampshire.

When I left Massachusetts years ago  
Between two days, the reason why I sought

New Hampshire, not Connecticut,  
Rhode Island, New York, or Vermont was this:  
Where I was living then, New Hampshire offered  
The nearest boundary to escape across.  
I hadn't an illusion in my hand-bag  
About the people being better there  
Than those I left behind. I thought they weren't.  
I thought they couldn't be. And yet they were.  
I'd sure had no such friends in Massachusetts  
As Hall of Windham, Gay of Atkinson,  
Bartlett of Raymond (now of Colorado),  
Harris of Derry, and Lynch of Bethlehem

The glorious bards of Massachusetts seem  
To want to make New Hampshire people over.  
They taunt the lofty land with little men.  
I don't know what to say about the people.  
For art's sake one could almost wish them worse  
Rather than better. How are we to write  
The Russian novel in America  
As long as life goes so unterribly?  
There is the pinch from which our only outcry  
In literature to date is heard to come.  
We get what little misery we can  
Out of not having cause for misery.  
It makes the guild of novel writers sick  
To be expected to be Dostoievskis  
On nothing worse than too much luck and comfort.  
This is not sorrow, though; it's just the vapors,  
And recognized as such in Russia itself

Under the new régime, and so forbidden.  
If well it is with Russia, then feel free  
To say so or be stood against the wall  
And shot. It's Pollyanna now or death.  
This, then, is the new freedom we hear tell of;  
And very sensible. No state can build  
A literature that shall at once be sound  
And sad on a foundation of well-being.

To show the level of intelligence  
Among us: it was just a Warren farmer  
Whose horse had pulled him short up in the road  
By me, a stranger. This is what he said,  
From nothing but embarrassment and want  
Of anything more sociable to say:  
'You hear those hound-dogs sing on Moosilauke?  
Well they remind me of the hue and cry  
We've heard against the Mid-Victorians  
And never rightly understood till Bryan  
Retired from politics and joined the chorus.  
The matter with the Mid-Victorians  
Seems to have been a man named John L. Darwin.'  
'Go 'long,' I said to him, he to his horse.

I knew a man who failing as a farmer  
Burned down his farmhouse for the fire insurance,  
And spent the proceeds on a telescope  
To satisfy a life-long curiosity  
About our place among the infinities.  
And how was that for other-worldliness?

If I must choose which I would elevate—  
The people or the already lofty mountains,  
I'd elevate the already lofty mountains.  
The only fault I find with old New Hampshire  
Is that her mountains aren't quite high enough.  
I was not always so; I've come to be so.  
How, to my sorrow, how have I attained  
A height from which to look down critical  
On mountains? What has given me assurance  
To say what height becomes New Hampshire mountains,  
Or any mountains? Can it be some strength  
I feel as of an earthquake in my back  
To heave them higher to the morning star?  
Can it be foreign travel in the Alps?  
Or having seen and credited a moment  
The solid moulding of vast peaks of cloud  
Behind the pitiful reality  
Of Lincoln, Lafayette and Liberty?  
Or some such sense as says how high shall jet  
The fountain in proportion to the basin?  
No, none of these has raised me to my throne  
Of intellectual dissatisfaction,  
But the sad accident of having seen  
Our actual mountains given in a map  
Of early times as twice the height they are—  
Ten thousand feet instead of only five—  
Which shows how sad an accident may be.  
Five thousand is no longer high enough.  
Whereas I never had a good idea

About improving people in the world,  
Here I am over-fertile in suggestion,  
And cannot rest from planning day or night  
How high I'd thrust the peaks in summer snow  
To tap the upper sky and draw a flow  
Of frosty night air on the vale below  
Down from the stars to freeze the dew as starry.

The more the sensibilitist I am  
The more I seem to want my mountains wild;  
The way the wiry gang-boss liked the log-jam.  
After he'd picked the lock and got it started,  
He dodged a log that lifted like an arm  
Against the sky to break his back for him,  
Then came in dancing, skipping, with his life  
Across the roar and chaos, and the words  
We saw him say along the zigzag journey  
Were doubtless as the words we heard him say  
On coming nearer: 'Wasn't she an *i*-deal  
Son-of-a-bitch? You bet she was an *i*-deal.'

For all her mountains fall a little short,  
Her people not quite short enough for Art,  
She's still New Hampshire, a most restful state.

Lately in converse with a New York alec  
About the new school of the pseudo-phallic,  
I found myself in a close corner where  
I had to make an almost funny choice.  
'Choose you which you will be—a prude, or puke,

Mewling and puking in the public arms.'  
'Me for the hills where I don't have to choose.'  
'But if you had to choose, which would you be?'  
I wouldn't be a prude afraid of nature.  
I know a man who took a double axe  
And went alone against a grove of trees;  
But his heart failing him, he dropped the axe  
And ran for shelter quoting Matthew Arnold:  
'Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;  
There's been enough shed without shedding mine.  
Remember Birnam Wood! The wood's in flux!'  
He had a special terror of the flux  
That showed itself in dendrophobia.  
The only decent tree had been to mill  
And educated into boards, he said.  
He knew too well for any earthly use  
The line where man leaves off and nature starts,  
And never over-stepped it save in dreams.  
He stood on the safe side of the line talking;  
Which is sheer Matthew Arnoldism,  
The cult of one who owned himself 'a foiled,  
Circuitous wanderer,' and 'took dejectedly  
His seat upon the intellectual throne.'  
Agreed in frowning on these improvised  
Altars the woods are full of nowadays,  
Again as in the days when Ahaz sinned  
By worship under green trees in the open.  
Scarcely a mile but that I come on one,  
A black-cheeked stone and stick of rain-washed  
charcoal

Even to say the groves were God's first temples  
Comes too near to Ahaz' sin for safety.  
Nothing not built with hands of course is sacred.  
But here is not a question of what's sacred;  
Rather of what to face or run away from.  
I'd hate to be a runaway from nature.  
And neither would I choose to be a puke  
Who cares not what he does in company,  
And, when he can't do anything, falls back  
On words, and tries his worst to make words speak  
Louder than actions, and sometimes achieves it.  
It seems a narrow choice the age insists on.  
How about being a good Greek, for instance?  
That course, they tell me, isn't offered this year.  
'Come, but this isn't choosing—puke or prude?'  
Well, if I have to choose one or the other,  
I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer  
With an income in cash of say a thousand  
(From say a publisher in New York City).  
It's restful to arrive at a decision,  
And restful just to think about New Hampshire.  
At present I am living in Vermont.



## A STAR IN A STONE-BOAT

(For Lincoln MacVeagh)

Never tell me that not one star of all  
That slip from heaven at night and softly fall!  
Has been picked up with stones to build a wall.

Some laborer found one faded and stone cold,  
And saving that its weight suggested gold,  
And tugged it from his first too certain hold,

He noticed nothing in it to remark.  
He was not used to handling stars thrown dark  
And lifeless from an interrupted arc.

He did not recognize in that smooth coal  
The one thing palpable besides the soul  
To penetrate the air in which we roll.

He did not see how like a flying thing  
It brooded ant-eggs, and had one large wing,  
One not so large for flying in a ring,

And a long Bird of Paradise's tail,  
(Though these when not in use to fly and trail  
It drew back in its body like a snail);

Nor know that he might move it from the spot,  
The harm was done; from having been star-shot  
The very nature of the soil was hot

And burning to yield flowers instead of grain,  
Flowers fanned and not put out by all the rain  
Poured on them by his prayers prayed in vain.

He moved it roughly with an iron bar,  
He loaded an old stone-boat with the star  
And not, as you might think, a flying car,

Such as even poets would admit perforce  
More practical than Pegasus the horse  
If it could put a star back in its course.

He dragged it through the ploughed ground at a pace  
But faintly reminiscent of the race  
Of jostling rock in interstellar space.

It went for building stone, and I, as though  
Commanded in a dream, forever go  
To right the wrong that this should have been so.

Yet ask where else it could have gone as well,  
I do not know—I cannot stop to tell:  
He might have left it lying where it fell.

From following walls I never lift my eye  
Except at night to places in the sky  
Where showers of charted meteors let fly.

Some may know what they seek in school and church,  
And why they seek it there; for what I search  
I must go measuring stone walls, perch on perch;

Sure that though not a star of death and birth,  
So not to be compared, perhaps, in worth  
To such resorts of life as Mars and Earth,

Though not, I say, a star of death and sin,  
It yet has poles, and only needs a spin  
To show its worldly nature and begin

To chafe and shuffle in my calloused palm  
And run off in strange tangents with my arm  
As fish do with the line in first alarm.

Such as it is, it promises the prize  
Of the one world complete in any size  
That I am like to compass, fool or wise.

## THE CENSUS-TAKER

I came an errand one cloud-blowing evening  
To a slab-built, black-paper-covered house  
Of one room and one window and one door,  
The only dwelling in a waste cut over  
A hundred square miles round it in the mountains:  
And that not dwelt in now by men or women.  
(It never had been dwelt in, though, by women,  
So what is this I make a sorrow of?)  
I came as census-taker to the waste  
To count the people in it and found none,  
None in the hundred miles, none in the house,  
Where I came last with some hope, but not much  
After hours' overlooking from the cliffs  
An emptiness flayed to the very stone.  
I found no people that dared show themselves,  
None not in hiding from the outward eye.  
The time was autumn, but how anyone  
Could tell the time of year when every tree  
That could have dropped a leaf was down itself  
And nothing but the stump of it was left  
Now bringing out its rings in sugar of pitch;  
And every tree up stood a rotting trunk  
Without a single leaf to spend on autumn,  
Or branch to whistle after what was spent.  
Perhaps the wind the more without the help  
Of breathing trees said something of the time  
Of year or day the way it swung a door

Forever off the latch, as if rude men  
Passed in and slammed it shut each one behind him  
For the next one to open for himself.  
I counted nine I had no right to count  
(But this was dreamy unofficial counting)  
Before I made the tenth across the threshold.  
Where was my supper? Where was anyone's?  
No lamp was lit. Nothing was on the table.  
The stove was cold—the stove was off the chimney—  
And down by one side where it lacked a leg.  
The people that had loudly passed the door  
Were people to the ear but not the eye.  
They were not on the table with their elbows.  
They were not sleeping in the shelves of bunks.  
I saw no men there and no bones of men there.  
I armed myself against such bones as might be  
With the pitch-blackened stub of an axe-handle  
I picked up off the straw-dust covered floor.  
Not bones, but the ill-fitted window rattled.  
The door was still because I held it shut  
While I thought what to do that could be done—  
About the house—about the people not there.  
This house in one year fallen to decay  
Filled me with no less sorrow than the houses  
Fallen to ruin in ten thousand years  
Where Asia wedges Africa from Europe.  
Nothing was left to do that I could see  
Unless to find that there was no one there  
And declare to the cliffs too far for echo,  
'The place is desert and let whoso lurks

In silence, if in this he is aggrieved,  
Break silence now or be forever silent.  
Let him say why it should not be declared so.'  
The melancholy of having to count souls  
Where they grow fewer and fewer every year  
Is extreme where they shrink to none at all.  
It must be I want life to go on living.

## THE STAR-SPLITTER

‘You know Orion always comes up sideways.  
Throwing a leg up over our fence of mountains,  
And rising on his hands, he looks in on me  
Busy outdoors by lantern-light with something  
I should have done by daylight, and indeed,  
After the ground is frozen, I should have done  
Before it froze, and a gust flings a handful  
Of waste leaves at my smoky lantern chimney  
To make fun of my way of doing things,  
Or else fun of Orion’s having caught me.  
Has a man, I should like to ask, no rights  
These forces are obliged to pay respect to?’  
So Brad McLaughlin mingled reckless talk  
Of heavenly stars with hugger-mugger farming,  
Till having failed at hugger-mugger farming,  
He burned his house down for the fire insurance  
And spent the proceeds on a telescope  
To satisfy a life-long curiosity  
About our place among the infinities.

‘What do you want with one of those blame things?’  
I asked him well beforehand. ‘Don’t you get one!’  
‘Don’t call it blamed; there isn’t anything  
More blameless in the sense of being less  
A weapon in our human fight,’ he said.  
‘I’ll have one if I sell my farm to buy it.’  
There where he moved the rocks to plow the ground

And plowed between the rocks he couldn't move,  
Few farms changed hands; so rather than spend years  
Trying to sell his farm and then not selling,  
He burned his house down for the fire insurance  
And bought the telescope with what it came to.  
He had been heard to say by several:  
'The best thing that we're put here for's to see;  
The strongest thing that's given us to see with's  
A telescope. Someone in every town  
Seems to me owes it to the town to keep one.  
In Littleton it may as well be me.'  
After such loose talk it was no surprise  
When he did what he did and burned his house down.

Mean laughter went about the town that day  
To let him know we weren't the least imposed on,  
And he could wait—we'd see to him to-morrow.  
But the first thing next morning we reflected  
If one by one we counted people out  
For the least sin, it wouldn't take us long  
To get so we had no one left to live with.  
For to be social is to be forgiving.  
Our thief, the one who does our stealing from us,s,  
We don't cut off from coming to church supper  
But what we miss we go to him and ask for.  
He promptly gives it back, that is if still  
Uneaten, unworn out, or undisposed of.  
It wouldn't do to be too hard on Brad  
About his telescope. Beyond the age  
Of being given one's gift for Christmas,



He had to take the best way he knew how  
To find himself in one. Well, all we said was  
He took a strange thing to be roguish over.  
Some sympathy was wasted on the house,  
A good old-timer dating back along;  
But a house isn't sentient; the house  
Didn't feel anything. And if it did,  
Why not regard it as a sacrifice,  
And an old-fashioned sacrifice by fire,  
Instead of a new-fashioned one at auction?

Out of a house and so out of a farm  
At one stroke (of a match), Brad had to turn  
To earn a living on the Concord railroad,  
As under-ticket-agent at a station  
Where his job, when he wasn't selling tickets,  
Was setting out up track and down, not plants  
As on a farm, but planets, evening stars  
That varied in their hue from red to green.

He got a good glass for six hundred dollars.  
His new job gave him leisure for star-gazing  
Often he bid me come and have a look  
Up the brass barrel, velvet black inside,  
At a star quaking in the other end.  
I recollect a night of broken clouds  
And underfoot snow melted down to ice,  
And melting further in the wind to mud.  
Bradford and I had out the telescope.  
We spread our two legs as we spread its three,

Pointed our thoughts the way we pointed it,  
And standing at our leisure till the day broke,  
Said some of the best things we ever said.  
That telescope was christened the Star-splitter,  
Because it didn't do a thing but split  
A star in two or three the way you split  
A globule of quicksilver in your hand  
With one stroke of your finger in the middle.  
It's a star-splitter if there ever was one  
And ought to do some good if splitting stars  
'Sa thing to be compared with splitting wood.  
We've looked and looked, but after all where are we?  
Do we know any better where we are,  
And how it stands between the night to-night  
And a man with a smoky lantern chimney?  
How different from the way it ever stood?

## THE AXE-HELVE

I've known ere now an interfering branch  
Of alder catch my lifted axe behind me.  
But that was in the woods, to hold my hand  
From striking at another alder's roots,  
And that was, as I say, an alder branch.  
This was a man, Baptiste, who stole one day  
Behind me on the snow in my own yard  
'Where I was working at the chopping-block,  
And cutting nothing not cut down already.  
He caught my axe expertly on the rise,  
When all my strength put forth was in his favor,  
Held it a moment where it was, to calm me,  
Then took it from me—and I let him take it.  
I didn't know him well enough to know  
What it was all about. There might be something  
He had in mind to say to a bad neighbor  
He might prefer to say to him disarmed.  
But all he had to tell me in French-English  
Was what he thought of—not me, but my axe;  
Me only as I took my axe to heart.  
It was the bad axe-helve some one had sold me—  
'Made on machine,' he said, ploughing the grain  
With a thick thumbnail to show how it ran  
Across the handle's long drawn serpentine,  
Like the two strokes across a dollar sign.  
'You give her one good crack, she's snap raght off.  
Den where's your hax-ead flying t'rough de hair?'  
Admitted; and yet, what was that to him?

'Come on my house and I put you one in  
What's las' awhile—good hick'ry what's grow  
crooked,  
De second growt' I cut myself—tough, tough!  
Something to sell? That wasn't how it sounded.

'Den when you say you come? It's cost you nothing.  
To-night?'

As well to-night as any night.

Beyond an over-warmth of kitchen stove  
My welcome differed from no other welcome.  
Baptiste knew best why I was where I was.  
So long as he would leave enough unsaid,  
I shouldn't mind his being overjoyed  
(If overjoyed he was) at having got me  
Where I must judge if what he knew about an axe  
That not everybody else knew was to count  
For nothing in the measure of a neighbor.  
Hard if, though cast away for life with Yankees,  
A Frenchman couldn't get his human rating!

Mrs. Baptiste came in and rocked a chair  
That had as many motions as the world:  
One back and forward, in and out of shadow,  
That got her nowhere; one more gradual,  
Sideways, that would have run her on the stove  
In time, had she not realized her danger  
And caught herself up bodily, chair and all,

And set herself back where she started from.  
'She ain't spick too much Henglish—dat's too bad.'

I was afraid, in brightening first on me,  
Then on Baptiste, as if she understood  
What passed between us, she was only feigning.  
Baptiste was anxious for her; but no more  
Than for himself, so placed he couldn't hope  
To keep his bargain of the morning with me  
In time to keep me from suspecting him  
Of really never having meant to keep it.

Needlessly soon he had his axe-helves out,  
A quiverful to choose from, since he wished me  
To have the best he had, or had to spare—  
Not for me to ask which, when what he took  
Had beauties he had to point me out at length  
To insure their not being wasted on me.  
He liked to have it slender as a whipstock,  
Free from the least knot, equal to the strain  
Of bending like a sword across the knee.  
He showed me that the lines of a good helve  
Were native to the grain before the knife  
Expressed them, and its curves were no false curves  
Put on it from without. And there its strength lay  
For the hard work. He chafed its long white body  
From end to end with his rough hand shut round it.  
He tried it at the eye-hole in the axe-head.  
'Hahn, hahn,' he mused, 'don't need much taking  
down.'

Baptiste knew how to make a short job long  
For love of it, and yet not waste time either.

Do you know, what we talked about was knowledge?  
Baptiste on his defence about the children  
He kept from school, or did his best to keep—  
Whatever school and children and our doubts  
Of laid-on education had to do  
With the curves of his axe-helves and his having  
Used these unscrupulously to bring me  
To see for once the inside of his house.  
Was I desired in friendship, partly as some one  
To leave it to, whether the right to hold  
Such doubts of education should depend  
Upon the education of those who held them?

But now he brushed the shavings from his knee  
And stood the axe there on its horse's hoof,  
Erect, but not without its waves, as when  
The snake stood up for evil in the Garden,—  
Top-heavy with a heaviness his short,  
Thick hand made light of, steel-blue chin drawn down  
And in a little—a French touch in that.  
Baptiste drew back and squinted at it, pleased;  
'See how she's cock her head!'

## THE GRINDSTONE

Having a wheel and four legs of its own  
Has never availed the cumbersome grindstone  
To get it anywhere that I can see.

These hands have helped it go, and even race;  
Not all the motion, though, they ever lent,  
Not all the miles it may have thought it went,  
Have got it one step from the starting place.  
It stands beside the same old apple tree.

The shadow of the apple tree is thin  
Upon it now, its feet are fast in snow.

All other farm machinery's gone in,  
And some of it on no more legs and wheel  
Than the grindstone can boast to stand or go.  
(I'm thinking chiefly of the wheelbarrow.)

For months it hasn't known the taste of steel,  
Washed down with rusty water in a tin.

But standing outdoors hungry, in the cold,  
Except in towns at night, is not a sin.

And, anyway, its standing in the yard  
Under a ruinous live apple tree

Has nothing any more to do with me,  
Except that I remember how of old

One summer day, all day I drove it hard,  
And someone mounted on it rode it hard,  
And he and I between us ground a blade.

I gave it the preliminary spin,  
And poured on water (tears it might have been);

And when it almost gayly jumped and flowed,  
A Father-Time-like man got on and rode,  
Armed with a scythe and spectacles that glowed.  
He turned on will-power to increase the load  
And slow me down—and I abruptly slowed,  
Like coming to a sudden railroad station.  
I changed from hand to hand in desperation.  
I wondered what machine of ages gone  
This represented an improvement on.  
For all I knew it may have sharpened spears  
And arrowheads itself. Much use for years  
Had gradually worn it an oblate  
Spheroid that kicked and struggled in its gait,<sup>1</sup>  
Appearing to return me hate for hate;  
(But I forgive it now as easily  
As any other boyhood enemy  
Whose pride has failed to get him anywhere).  
I wondered who it was the man thought ground—  
The one who held the wheel back or the one  
Who gave his life to keep it going round?  
I wondered if he really thought it fair  
For him to have the say when we were done.  
Such were the bitter thoughts to which I turned.

Not for myself was I so much concerned.  
Oh no!—although, of course, I could have found  
A better way to pass the afternoon  
Than grinding discord out of a grindstone,  
And beating insects at their gritty tune.  
Nor was I for the man so much concerned.



Once when the grindstone almost jumped its bearing  
It looked as if he might be badly thrown  
And wounded on his blade. So far from caring,  
I laughed inside, and only cranked the faster,  
(It ran as if it wasn't greased but glued);  
I'd welcome any moderate disaster  
That might be calculated to postpone  
What evidently nothing could conclude.  
The thing that made me more and more afraid  
Was that we'd ground it sharp and hadn't known.  
And now were only wasting precious blade.  
And when he raised it dripping once and tried  
The creepy edge of it with wary touch,  
And viewed it over his glasses funny-eyed,  
Only disinterestedly to decide  
It needed a turn more, I could have cried  
Wasn't there danger of a turn too much?  
Mightn't we make it worse instead of better?  
I was for leaving something to the whetter.  
What if it wasn't all it should be? I'd  
Be satisfied if he'd be satisfied.

## PAUL'S WIFE

To drive Paul out of any lumber camp  
All that was needed was to say to him,  
'How is the wife, Paul?'—and he'd disappear.  
Some said it was because he had no wife,  
And hated to be twitted on the subject.  
Others because he'd come within a day  
Or so of having one, and then been jilted.  
Others because he'd had one once, a good one,  
Who'd run away with some one else and left him.  
And others still because he had one now  
He only had to be reminded of,—  
He was all duty to her in a minute:  
He had to run right off to look her up,  
As if to say, 'That's so, how is my wife?  
I hope she isn't getting into mischief.'  
No one was anxious to get rid of Paul.  
He'd been the hero of the mountain camps  
Ever since, just to show them, he had slipped  
The bark of a whole tamarack off whole,  
As clean as boys do off a willow twig  
To make a willow whistle on a Sunday  
In April by subsiding meadow brooks.  
They seemed to ask him just to see him go,  
'How is the wife, Paul?' and he always went.  
He never stopped to murder anyone  
Who asked the question. He just disappeared—  
Nobody knew in what direction,  
Although it wasn't usually long

Before they heard of him in some new camp,  
The same Paul at the same old feats of logging.  
The question everywhere was why should Paul  
Object to being asked a civil question—  
A man you could say almost anything to  
Short of a fighting word. You have the answers.  
And there was one more not so fair to Paul:  
That Paul had married a wife not his equal.  
Paul was ashamed of her. To match a hero,  
She would have had to be a heroine;  
Instead of which she was some half-breed squaw.  
But if the story Murphy told was true,  
She wasn't anything to be ashamed of.

You know Paul could do wonders. Everyone's  
Heard how he thrashed the horses on a load  
That wouldn't budge until they simply stretched  
Their rawhide harness from the load to camp.  
Paul told the boss the load would be all right,  
'The sun will bring your load in'—and it did—  
By shrinking the rawhide to natural length.  
That's what is called a stretcher. But I guess  
The one about his jumping so's to land  
With both his feet at once against the ceiling,  
And then land safely right side up again,  
Back on the floor, is fact or pretty near fact.  
Well this is such a yarn. Paul sawed his wife  
Out of a white-pine log. Murphy was there,  
And, as you might say, saw the lady born.  
Paul worked at anything in lumbering.

He'd been hard at it taking boards away  
For—I forget—the last ambitious sawyer  
To want to find out if he couldn't pile  
The lumber on Paul till Paul begged for mercy  
They'd sliced the first slab off a big butt log,  
And the sawyer had slammed the carriage back  
To slam end on again against the saw teeth.  
To judge them by the way they caught themselves  
When they saw what had happened to the log,  
They must have had a guilty expectation  
Something was going to go with their slambanging.  
Something had left a broad black streak of grease  
On the new wood the whole length of the log  
Except, perhaps, a foot at either end.  
But when Paul put his finger in the grease,  
It wasn't grease at all, but a long slot.  
The log was hollow. They were sawing pine.  
'First time I ever saw a hollow pine.  
That comes of having Paul around the place.  
Take it to hell for me,' the sawyer said.  
Everyone had to have a look at it,  
And tell Paul what he ought to do about it.  
(They treated it as his.) 'You take a jack-knife,  
And spread the opening, and you've got a dug-out  
All dug to go a-fishing in.' To Paul  
The hollow looked too sound and clean and empty  
Ever to have housed birds or beasts or bees.  
There was no entrance for them to get in by.  
It looked to him like some new kind of hollow  
He thought he'd *better* take his jack-knife to.

So after work that evening he came back  
And let enough light into it by cutting  
To see if it was empty. He made out in there  
A slender length of pith, or was it pith?  
It might have been the skin a snake had cast  
And left stood up on end inside the tree  
The hundred years the tree must have been growing  
More cutting and he had this in both hands,  
And, looking from it to the pond near by,  
Paul wondered how it would respond to water.  
Not a breeze stirred, but just the breath of air  
He made in walking slowly to the beach  
Blew it once off his hands and almost broke it.  
He laid it at the edge where it could drink.  
At the first drink it rustled and grew limp.  
At the next drink it grew invisible.  
Paul dragged the shallows for it with his fingers,  
And thought it must have melted. It was gone.  
And then beyond the open water, dim with midges,  
Where the log drive lay pressed against the boom,  
It slowly rose a person, rose a girl,  
Her wet hair heavy on her like a helmet,  
Who, leaning on a log looked back at Paul.  
And that made Paul in turn look back  
To see if it was anyone behind him  
That she was looking at instead of him.  
Murphy had been there watching all the time,  
But from a shed where neither of them could see him  
There was a moment of suspense in birth  
When the girl seemed too water-logged to live,  
Before she caught her first breath with a gasp

And laughed. Then she climbed slowly to her feet,  
And walked off talking to herself or Paul  
Across the logs like backs of alligators,  
Paul taking after her around the pond.

¶

Next evening Murphy and some other fellows  
Got drunk, and tracked the pair up Catamount,  
From the bare top of which there is a view  
To other hills across a kettle valley.  
And there, well after dark, let Murphy tell it,  
They saw Paul and his creature keeping house.  
It was the only glimpse that anyone  
Has had of Paul and her since Murphy saw them  
Falling in love across the twilight mill-pond.  
More than a mile across the wilderness  
They sat together half-way up a cliff  
In a small niche let into it, the girl  
Brightly, as if a star played on the place,  
Paul darkly, like her shadow. All the light  
Was from the girl herself, though, not from a star,  
As was apparent from what happened next.  
All those great ruffians put their throats together,  
And let out a loud yell, and threw a bottle,  
As a brute tribute of respect to beauty.  
Of course the bottle fell short by a mile,  
But the shout reached the girl and put her light out,  
She went out like a firefly, and that was all.

So there were witnesses that Paul was married,  
And not to anyone to be ashamed of.  
Everyone had been wrong in judging Paul.

Murphy told me Paul put on all those airs  
About his wife to keep her to himself.  
Paul was what's called a terrible possessor.  
Owning a wife with him meant owning her.  
She wasn't anybody else's business,  
Either to praise her, or so much as name her,  
And he'd thank people not to think of her.  
Murphy's idea was that a man like Paul  
Wouldn't be spoken to about a wife  
In any way the world knew how to speak.

## WILD GRAPES

What tree may not the fig be gathered from?  
The grape may not be gathered from the birch?  
It's all you know the grape, or know the birch.  
As a girl gathered from the birch myself  
Equally with my weight in grapes, one autumn,  
I ought to know what tree the grape is fruit of.  
I was born, I suppose, like anyone,  
And grew to be a little boyish girl  
My brother could not always leave at home.  
But that beginning was wiped out in fear  
The day I swung suspended with the grapes,  
And was come after like Eurydice  
And brought down safely from the upper regions;  
And the life I live now's an extra life  
I can waste as I please on whom I please.  
So if you see me celebrate two birthdays,  
And give myself out as two different ages,  
One of them five years younger than I look—

One day my brother led me to a glade  
Where a white birch he knew of stood alone,  
Wearing a thin head-dress of pointed leaves,  
And heavy on her heavy hair behind,  
Against her neck, an ornament of grapes.  
Grapes, I knew grapes from having seen them last  
year.  
One bunch of them, and there began to be



Bunches all round me growing in white birches,  
The way they grew round Lief the Lucky's German;  
Mostly as much beyond my lifted hands, though,  
As the moon used to seem when I was younger,  
And only freely to be had for climbing.  
My brother did the climbing; and at first  
Threw me down grapes to miss and scatter  
And have to hunt for in sweet fern and hardhack;  
Which gave him some time to himself to eat,  
But not so much, perhaps, as a boy needed.  
So then, to make me wholly self-supporting,  
He climbed still higher and bent the tree to earth,  
And put it in my hands to pick my own grapes.  
'Here, take a tree-top, I'll get down another.  
Hold on with all your might when I let go.'  
I said I had the tree. It wasn't true.  
The opposite was true. The tree had me.  
The minute it was left with me alone  
It caught me up as if I were the fish  
And it the fishpole. So I was translated  
To loud cries from my brother of 'Let go!  
Don't you know anything, you girl? Let go!'   
But I, with something of the baby grip  
Acquired ancestrally in just such trees  
When wilder mothers than our wildest now  
Hung babies out on branches by the hands  
To dry or wash or tan, I don't know which  
(You'll have to ask an evolutionist)—  
I held on uncomplainingly for life.  
My brother tried to make me laugh to help me.

'What are you doing up there in those grapes?  
Don't be afraid. A few of them won't hurt you.  
I mean, they won't pick you if you don't them.'  
Much danger of my picking anything!  
By that time I was pretty well reduced  
To a philosophy of hang-and-let-hang.  
'Now you know how it feels,' my brother said,  
'To be a bunch of fox-grapes, as they call them,  
That when it thinks it has escaped the fox  
By growing where it shouldn't—on a birch,  
Where a fox wouldn't think to look for it—  
And if he looked and found it, couldn't reach it—  
Just then come you and I to gather it.  
Only you have the advantage of the grapes  
In one way: you have one more stem to cling by,  
And promise more resistance to the picker.'

One by one I lost off my hat and shoes,  
And still I clung. I let my head fall back,  
And shut my eyes against the sun, my ears  
Against my brother's nonsense; 'Drop,' he said,  
'I'll catch you in my arms. It isn't far.'  
(Stated in lengths of him it might not be.)  
'Drop or I'll shake the tree and shake you down.'  
Grim silence on my part as I sank lower,  
My small wrists stretching till they showed the ban-  
jo strings.  
'Why, if she isn't serious about it!  
Hold tight awhile till I think what to do.  
I'll bend the tree down and let you down by it.'

I don't know much about the letting down;  
But once I felt ground with my stocking feet  
And the world came revolving back to me,  
I know I looked long at my curled-up fingers,  
Before I straightened them and brushed the bark off.  
My brother said: 'Don't you weigh anything?  
Try to weigh something next time, so you won't  
Be run off with by birch trees into space.'

It wasn't my not weighing anything  
So much as my not knowing anything—  
My brother had been nearer right before.  
I had not taken the first step in knowledge;  
I had not learned to let go with the hands,  
As still I have not learned to with the heart,  
And have no wish to with the heart—nor need,  
That I can see. The mind—is not the heart.  
I may yet live, as I know others live,  
To wish in vain to let go with the mind—  
Of cares, at night, to sleep; but nothing tells me  
That I need learn to let go with the heart.

## THE WITCH OF COÖS

I staid the night for shelter at a farm  
Behind the mountain, with a mother and son,  
Two old-believers. They did all the talking.

MOTHER. Folks think a witch who has familiar  
spirits  
She could call up to pass a winter evening,  
But won't, should be burned at the stake or some-  
thing.  
Summoning spirits isn't 'Button, button,  
Who's got the button,' I would have them know.

SON. Mother can make a common table rear  
And kick with two legs like an army mule.

MOTHER. And when I've done it, what good have  
I done?  
Rather than tip a table for you, let me  
Tell you what Ralle the Sioux Control once told me.  
He said the dead had souls, but when I asked him  
How could that be—I thought the dead were souls,  
He broke my trance. Don't that make you suspicious  
That there's something the dead are keeping back?  
Yes, there's something the dead are keeping back.

SON. You wouldn't want to tell him what we have  
Up attic, mother?

MOTHER. Bones—a skeleton.

SON. But the headboard of mother's bed is pushed  
Against the attic door: the door is nailed.  
It's harmless. Mother hears it in the night  
Halting perplexed behind the barrier  
Of door and headboard. Where it wants to get  
Is back into the cellar where it came from.

MOTHER. We'll never let them, will we, son! We'll  
never!

SON. It left the cellar forty years ago  
And carried itself like a pile of dishes  
Up one flight from the cellar to the kitchen,  
Another from the kitchen to the bedroom,  
Another from the bedroom to the attic,  
Right past both father and mother, and neither  
stopped it.  
Father had gone upstairs; mother was downstairs.  
I was a baby: I don't know where I was.

MOTHER. The only fault my husband found with me—  
I went to sleep before I went to bed,  
Especially in winter when the bed  
Might just as well be ice and the clothes snow.  
The night the bones came up the cellar-stairs  
Toffile had gone to bed alone and left me,  
But left an open door to cool the room off  
So as to sort of turn me out of it.

I was just coming to myself enough  
To wonder where the cold was coming from,  
When I heard Toffile upstairs in the bedroom  
And thought I heard him downstairs in the cellar.  
The board we had laid down to walk dry-shod on  
When there was water in the cellar in spring  
Struck the hard cellar bottom. And then someone  
Began the stairs, two footsteps for each step,  
The way a man with one leg and a crutch,  
Or a little child, comes up. It wasn't Toffile:  
It wasn't anyone who could be there.  
The bulkhead double-doors were double-locked  
And swollen tight and buried under snow.  
The cellar windows were banked up with sawdust  
And swollen tight and buried under snow.  
It was the bones. I knew them—and good reason.  
My first impulse was to get to the knob  
And hold the door. But the bones didn't try  
The door; they halted helpless on the landing,  
Waiting for things to happen in their favor.  
The faintest restless rustling ran all through them.  
I never could have done the thing I did  
If the wish hadn't been too strong in me  
To see how they were mounted for this walk.  
I had a vision of them put together  
Not like a man, but like a chandelier.  
So suddenly I flung the door wide on him.  
A moment he stood balancing with emotion,  
And all but lost himself. (A tongue of fire

Flashed out and licked along his upper teeth.  
Smoke rolled inside the sockets of his eyes.)  
Then he came at me with one hand outstretched,  
The way he did in life once; but this time  
I struck the hand off brittle on the floor,  
And fell back from him on the floor myself.  
The finger-pieces slid in all directions.  
(Where did I see one of those pieces lately?  
Hand me my button-box—it must be there.)  
I sat up on the floor and shouted, 'Toffile,  
It's coming up to you.' It had its choice  
Of the door to the cellar or the hall.  
It took the hall door for the novelty,  
And set off briskly for so slow a thing,  
Still going every which way in the joints, though,  
So that it looked like lightning or a scribble,  
From the slap I had just now given its hand.  
I listened till it almost climbed the stairs  
From the hall to the only finished bedroom,  
Before I got up to do anything;  
Then ran and shouted, 'Shut the bedroom door,  
Toffile, for my sake!' 'Company?' he said,  
'Don't make me get up; I'm too warm in bed.'  
So lying forward weakly on the handrail  
I pushed myself upstairs, and in the light  
(The kitchen had been dark) I had to own  
I could see nothing. 'Toffile, I don't see it.  
It's with us in the room though. It's the bones.'  
'What bones?' 'The cellar bones—out of the grave.'

That made him throw his bare legs out of bed  
And sit up by me and take hold of me.  
I wanted to put out the light and see  
If I could see it, or else mow the room,  
With our arms at the level of our knees,  
And bring the chalk-pile down. 'I'll tell you what—  
It's looking for another door to try.  
The uncommonly deep snow has made him think  
Of his old song, *The Wild Colonial Boy*,  
He always used to sing along the tote-road.  
He's after an open door to get out-doors.  
Let's trap him with an open door up attic.'  
Toffile agreed to that, and sure enough,  
Almost the moment he was given an opening,  
The steps began to climb the attic stairs.  
I heard them. Toffile didn't seem to hear them.  
'Quick!' I slammed to the door and held the knob.  
'Toffile, get nails.' I made him nail the door shut  
And push the headboard of the bed against it.  
Then we asked was there anything  
Up attic that we'd ever want again.  
The attic was less to us than the cellar.  
If the bones liked the attic, let them have it.  
Let them stay in the attic. When they sometimes  
Come down the stairs at night and stand perplexed  
Behind the door and headboard of the bed,  
Brushing their chalky skull with chalky fingers,  
With sounds like the dry rattling of a shutter,  
That's what I sit up in the dark to say—



To no one any more since Toffile died.  
Let them stay in the attic since they went there.  
I promised Toffile to be cruel to them  
For helping them be cruel once to him.

SON. We think they had a grave down in the cellar.

MOTHER. We know they had a grave down in the  
cellar.

SON. We never could find out whose bones they  
were.

MOTHER. Yes, we could too, son. Tell the truth for  
once

They were a man's his father killed for me.  
I mean a man he killed instead of me.  
The least I could do was to help dig their grave.  
We were about it one night in the cellar.  
Son knows the story: but 'twas not for him  
To tell the truth, suppose the time had come.  
Son looks surprised to see me end a lie  
We'd kept all these years between ourselves  
So as to have it ready for outsiders.  
But tonight I don't care enough to lie—  
I don't remember why I ever cared.  
Toffile, if he were here, I don't believe  
Could tell you why he ever cared himself. . .

She hadn't found the finger-bone she wanted  
Among the buttons poured out in her lap.  
I verified the name next morning: Toffile.  
The rural letter-box said Toffile Lajway.

## AN EMPTY THREAT

I stay;  
But it isn't as if  
There wasn't always Hudson's Bay  
And the fur trade,  
A small skiff  
And a paddle blade.

I can just see my tent pegged,  
And me on the floor,  
Crosslegged,  
And a trapper looking in at the door  
With furs to sell.

His name's Joe,  
Alias John,  
And between what he doesn't know  
And won't tell  
About where Henry Hudson's gone,  
I can't say he's much help;  
But we get on.

The seal yelp  
On an ice cake.  
It's not men by some mistake?

No,  
There's not a soul

For a wind-break  
Between me and the North Pole—

Except always John-Joe,  
My French Indian Esquimaux.  
And he's off setting traps,  
In one himself perhaps.

Give a head shake  
Over so much bay  
Thrown away  
In snow and mist  
That doesn't exist,  
I was going to say,  
For God, man or beast's sake.  
Yet does perhaps for all three.

Don't ask Joe  
What it is to him.  
It's sometimes dim  
What it is to me,  
Unless it be  
It's the old captain's dark fate  
Who failed to find or force a strait  
In its two-thousand-mile coast;  
And his crew left him where he failed,  
And nothing came of all he sailed.

It's to say, 'You and I'  
To such a ghost,

'You and I  
Off here  
With the dead race of the Greak Auk!  
And, 'Better defeat almost,  
If seen clear,  
Than life's victories of doubt  
That need endless talk talk  
To make them out.'

## FRAGMENTARY BLUE

Why make so much of fragmentary blue  
In here and there a bird, or butterfly,  
Or flower, or wearing-stone, or open eye,  
When heaven presents in sheets the solid hue?

Since earth is earth, perhaps, not heaven (as yet)—  
Though some savants make earth include the sky;  
And blue so far above us comes so high,  
It only gives our wish for blue a whet.

## FIRE AND ICE.

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great  
And would suffice.

## DUST OF SNOW

The way a crow  
Shook down on me  
The dust of snow  
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart  
A change of mood  
And saved some part  
Of a day I had rued.



TO E. T.

I slumbered with your poems on my breast  
Spread open as I dropped them half-read through  
Like dove wings on a figure on a tomb  
To see, if in a dream they brought of you,

I might not have the chance I missed in life  
Through some delay, and call you to your face  
First soldier, and then poet, and then both,  
Who died a soldier-poet of your race.

I meant, you meant, that nothing should remain  
Unsaid between us, brother, and this remained—  
And one thing more that was not then to say:  
The Victory for what it lost and gained.

You went to meet the shell's embrace of fire  
On Vimy Ridge; and when you fell that day  
The war seemed over more for you than me,  
But now for me than you—the other way.

How over, though, for even me who knew  
The foe thrust back unsafe beyond the Rhine,  
If I was not to speak of it to you  
And see you pleased once more with words of mine?

## NOTHING GOLD CAN STAY

Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.  
Then leaf subsides to leaf.  
So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay.

## THE RUNAWAY

Once when the snow of the year was beginning to  
fall,

We stopped by a mountain pasture to say, 'Whose  
colt?'

A little Morgan had one forefoot on the wall,  
The other curled at his breast. He dipped his head  
And snorted at us. And then he had to bolt.  
We heard the miniature thunder where he fled,  
And we saw him, or thought we saw him, dim and  
grey,

Like a shadow against the curtain of falling flakes.

'I think the little fellow's afraid of the snow.

He isn't winter-broken. It isn't play

With the little fellow at all. He's running away.

I doubt if even his mother could tell him, "Sakes,

It's only weather." He'd think she didn't know!

'Where is his mother? He can't be out alone.'

And now he comes again with clatter of stone,

And mounts the wall again with whited eyes

And all his tail that isn't hair up straight.

He shudders his coat as if to throw off flies.

'Whoever it is that leaves him out so late,

When other creatures have gone to stall and bin,

Ought to be told to come and take him in.'

## THE AIM WAS SONG

Before man came to blow it right  
The wind once blew itself untaught,  
And did its loudest day and night  
In any rough place where it caught.

Man came to tell it what was wrong:  
It hadn't found the place to blow;  
It blew too hard—the aim was song.  
And listen—how it ought to go!

He took a little in his mouth,  
And held it long enough for north  
To be converted into south,  
And then by measure blew it forth.

By measure. It was word and note,  
The wind the wind had meant to be—  
A little through the lips and throat.  
The aim was song—the wind could see.

## STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING

Whose woods these are I think I know  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

## FOR ONCE, THEN, SOMETHING

Others taunt me with having knelt at well-curbs  
Always wrong to the light, so never seeing  
Deeper down in the well than where the water  
Gives me back in a shining surface picture  
Me myself in the summer heaven godlike  
Looking out of a wreath of fern and cloud puffs.  
*Once*, when trying with chin against a well-curb,  
I discerned, as I thought, beyond the picture,  
Through the picture, a something white, uncertain,  
Something more of the depths—and then I lost it.  
Water came to rebuke the too clear water.  
One drop fell from a fern, and lo, a ripple  
Shook whatever it was lay there at bottom,  
Blurred it, blotted it out. What was that whiteness?  
Truth? A pebble of quartz? For once, then, something.

## BLUE-BUTTERFLY DAY

It is blue-butterfly day here in spring,  
And with these sky-flakes down in flurry on flurry  
There is more unmixed color on the wing  
Than flowers will show for days unless they hurry.

But these are flowers that fly and all but sing:  
And now from having ridden out desire  
They lie closed over in the wind and cling  
Where wheels have freshly sliced the April mire.

## THE ONSET

Always the same, when on a fated night  
At last the gathered snow lets down as white  
As may be in dark woods, and with a song  
It shall not make again all winter long  
Of hissing on the yet uncovered ground,  
I almost stumble looking up and round,  
As one who overtaken by the end  
Gives up his errand, and lets death descend  
Upon him where he is, with nothing done  
To evil, no important triumph won,  
More than if life had never been begun.

Yet all the precedent is on my side:  
I know that winter death has never tried  
The earth but it has failed: the snow may heap  
In long storms an-undrifted four feet deep  
As measured against maple, birch and oak,  
It cannot check the peeper's silver croak;  
And I shall see the snow all go down hill  
In water of a slender April rill  
That flashes tail through last year's withered brake  
And dead weeds, like a disappearing snake.  
Nothing will be left white but here a birch,  
And there a clump of houses with a church.



## TO EARTHWARD

Love at the lips was touch  
As sweet as I could bear;  
And once that seemed too much;  
I lived on air

That crossed me from sweet things,  
The flow of—was it musk  
From hidden grapevine springs  
Down hill at dusk?

I had the swirl and ache  
From sprays of honeysuckle  
That when they're gathered shake  
Dew on the knuckle.

I craved strong sweets, but those  
Seemed strong when I was young;  
The petal of the rose  
It was that stung.

Now no joy but lacks salt  
That is not dashed with pain  
And weariness and fault;  
I crave the stain

Of tears, the aftermark  
Of almost too much love,

The sweet of bitter bark  
And burning clove.

When stiff and sore and scarred  
I take away my hand  
From leaning on it hard  
In grass and sand,

The hurt is not enough:  
I long for weight and strength  
To feel the earth as rough  
To all my length.

## GOOD-BYE AND KEEP COLD

This saying good-bye on the edge of the dark  
And the cold to an orchard so young in the bark  
Reminds me of all that can happen to harm  
An orchard away at the end of the farm  
All winter, cut off by a hill from the house.  
I don't want it girdled by rabbit and mouse,  
I don't want it dreamily nibbled for browse  
By deer, and I don't want it budded by grouse.  
(If certain it wouldn't be idle to call  
I'd summon grouse, rabbit, and deer to the wall  
And warn them away with a stick for a gun.)  
I don't want it stirred by the heat of the sun.  
(We made it secure against being, I hope,  
By setting it out on a northerly slope.)  
No orchard's the worse for the wintriest storm;  
But one thing about it, it mustn't get warm.  
'How often already you've had to be told,  
Keep cold, young orchard. Good-bye and keep cold.  
Dread fifty above more than fifty below.'  
I have to be gone for a season or so.  
My business a while is with different trees,  
Less carefully nurtured, less fruitful than these,  
And such as is done to their wood with an axe—  
Maples and birches and tamaracks.  
I wish I could promise to lie in the night  
And think of an orchard's arboreal plight

When slowly (and nobody comes with a light)  
Its heart sinks lower under the sod.  
But something has to be left to God.

## TWO LOOK AT TWO

Love and forgetting might have carried them  
A little further up the mountain side  
With night so near, but not much further up.  
They must have halted soon in any case  
With thoughts of the path back, how rough it was  
With rock and washout, and unsafe in darkness;  
When they were halted by a tumbled wall  
With barbed-wire binding. They stood facing this,  
Spending what onward impulse they still had  
In one last look the way they must not go,  
On up the failing path, where, if a stone  
Or earthslide moved at night, it moved itself;  
No footstep moved it. 'This is all,' they sighed,  
'Good-night to woods.' But not so; there was more.  
A doe from round a spruce stood looking at them  
Across the wall, as near the wall as they.  
She saw them in their field, they her in hers.  
The difficulty of seeing what stood still,  
Like some up-ended boulder split in two,  
Was in her clouded eyes: they saw no fear there.  
She seemed to think that two thus they were safe.  
Then, as if they were something that, though strange,  
She could not trouble her mind with too long,  
She sighed and passed unscared along the wall.  
'*This*, then, is all. What more is there to ask?'  
But no, not yet. A snort to bid them wait.  
A buck from round the spruce stood looking at them

Across the wall as near the wall as they.  
This was an antlered buck of lusty nostril,  
Not the same doe come back into her place.  
He viewed them quizzically with jerks of head,  
As if to ask, 'Why don't you make some motion?  
Or give some sign of life? Because you can't.  
I doubt if you're as living as you look.'  
Thus till he had them almost feeling dared  
To stretch a proffering hand—and a spell-breaking.  
Then he too passed unscared along the wall.  
Two had seen two, whichever side you spoke from.  
'This *must* be all.' It was all. Still they stood,  
A great wave from it going over them,  
As if the earth in one unlooked-for favor  
Had made them certain earth returned their love.

## NOT TO KEEP

They sent him back to her. The letter came  
Saying . . . And she could have him. And before  
She could be sure there was no hidden ill  
Under the formal writing, he was in her sight,  
Living. They gave him back to her alive—  
How else? They are not known to send the dead—  
And not disfigured visibly. His face?  
His hands? She had to look, to ask,  
'What is it, dear?' And she had given all  
And still she had all—*they* had—they the lucky!  
Wasn't she glad now? Everything seemed won,  
And all the rest for them permissible ease.  
She had to ask, 'What was it, dear?'

'Enough,

Yet not enough. A bullet through and through,  
High in the breast. Nothing but what good care  
And medicine and rest, and you a week,  
Can cure me of to go again.' The same  
Grim giving to do over for them both.  
She dared no more than ask him with her eyes  
How was it with him for a second trial.  
And with his eyes he asked her not to ask.  
They had given him back to her, but not to keep.

## A BROOK IN THE CITY

The farm house lingers, though averse to square  
With the new city street it has to wear  
A number in. But what about the brook  
That held the house as in an elbow-crook?  
I ask as one who knew the brook, its strength  
And impulse, having dipped a finger length  
And made it leap my knuckle, having tossed  
A flower to try its currents where they crossed.  
The meadow grass could be cemented down  
From growing under pavements of a town;  
The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame.  
Is water wood to serve a brook the same?  
How else dispose of an immortal force  
No longer needed? Staunch it at its source  
With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was  
    thrown  
Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone  
In fetid darkness still to live and run—  
And all for nothing it had ever done  
Except forget to go in fear perhaps.  
No one would know except for ancient maps  
That such a brook ran water. But I wonder  
If from its being kept forever under  
The thoughts may not have risen that so keep  
This new-built city from both work and sleep.



## THE KITCHEN CHIMNEY

Builder, in building the little house,  
In every way you may please yourself;  
But please please me in the kitchen chimney:  
Don't build me a chimney upon a shelf.

However far you must go for bricks,  
Whatever they cost a-piece or a pound,  
Buy me enough for a full-length chimney,  
And build the chimney clear from the ground.

It's not that I'm greatly afraid of fire,  
But I never heard of a house that throve  
(And I know of one that didn't thrive)  
Where the chimney started above the stove.'

And I dread the ominous stain of tar  
That there always is on the papered walls,  
And the smell of fire drowned in rain  
That there always is when the chimney's false.

A shelf's for a clock or vase or picture,  
But I don't see why it should have to bear  
A chimney that only would serve to remind me  
Of castles I used to build in air.

## LOOKING FOR A SUNSET BIRD IN WINTER

The west was getting out of gold,  
The breath of air had died of cold,  
When shoeing home across the white,  
I thought I saw a bird alight.

In summer when I passed the place  
I had to stop and lift my face;  
A bird with an angelic gift  
Was singing in it sweet and swift.

No bird was singing in it now.  
A single leaf was on a bough,  
And that was all there was to see  
In going twice around the tree.

From my advantage on a hill  
I judged that such a crystal chill  
Was only adding frost to snow  
As gilt to gold that wouldn't show.

A brush had left a crooked stroke  
Of what was either cloud or smoke  
From north to south across the blue;  
A piercing little star was through.

## GATHERING LEAVES

Spades take up leaves  
No better than spoons,  
And bags full of leaves  
Are light as balloons.

I make a great noise  
Of rustling all day  
Like rabbit and deer  
Running away.

But the mountains I raise  
Elude my embrace,  
Flowing over my arms  
And into my face.

I may load and unload  
Again and again  
Till I fill the whole shed,  
And what have I then?

Next to nothing for weight;  
And since they grew duller  
From contact with earth,  
Next to nothing for color.

Next to nothing for use.  
But a crop is a crop,  
And who's to say where  
The harvest shall stop?

## MISGIVING

All crying 'We will go with you, O Wind!  
The foliage follow him, leaf and stem;  
But a sleep oppresses them as they go,  
And they end by bidding him stay with them.

Since ever they flung abroad in spring  
The leaves had promised themselves this flight,  
Who now would fain seek sheltering wall,  
Or thicket, or hollow place for the night.

And now they answer his summoning blast  
With an ever vaguer and vaguer stir,  
Or at utmost a little reluctant whirl  
That drops them no further than where they were

I only hope that when I am free  
As they are free to go in quest  
Of the knowledge beyond the bounds of life  
It may not seem better to me to rest.

## PLOWMEN

A plow, they say, to plow the snow.  
They cannot mean to plant it, though—  
Unless in bitterness to mock  
At having cultivated rock.

# ON A TREE FALLEN ACROSS THE ROAD

(TO HEAR US TALK)

The tree the tempest with a crash of wood  
Throws down in front of us is not to bar  
Our passage to our journey's end for good,  
But just to ask us who we think we are

Insisting always on our own way so.  
She likes to halt us in our runner tracks,  
And make us get down in a foot of snow  
Debating what to do without an axe.

And yet she knows obstruction is in vain:  
We will not be put off the final goal  
We have it hidden in us to attain,  
Not though we have to seize earth by the pole

And, tired of aimless circling in one place,  
Steer straight off after something into space.

## OUR SINGING STRENGTH

It snowed in spring on earth so dry and warm  
The flakes could find no landing place to form.  
Hordes spent themselves to make it wet and cold,  
And still they failed of any lasting hold.  
They made no white impression on the black.  
They disappeared as if earth sent them back.  
Not till from separate flakes they changed at night  
To almost strips and tapes of ragged white  
Did grass and garden ground confess it snowed,  
And all go back to winter but the road.  
Next day the scene was piled and puffed and dead.  
The grass lay flattened under one great tread.  
Borne down until the end almost took root,  
The rangey bough anticipated fruit  
With snowballs cupped in every opening bud.  
The road alone maintained itself in mud,  
Whatever its secret was of greater heat  
From inward fires or brush of passing feet.

In spring more mortal singers than belong  
To any one place cover us with song.  
Thrush, bluebird, blackbird, sparrow, and robin  
throng;  
Some to go further north to Hudson's Bay,  
Some that have come too far north back away,  
Really a very few to build and stay.  
Now was seen how these liked belated snow.



The fields had nowhere left for them to go;  
They'd soon exhausted all there was in flying;  
The trees they'd had enough of with once trying  
And setting off their heavy powder load.  
They could find nothing open but the road.  
So there they let their lives be narrowed in  
By thousands the bad weather made akin.  
The road became a channel running flocks  
Of glossy birds like ripples over rocks.  
I drove them under foot in bits of flight  
That kept the ground, almost disputing right  
Of way with me from apathy of wing,  
A talking twitter all they had to sing.  
A few I must have driven to despair  
Made quick asides, but having done in air  
A whirl among white branches great and small  
As in some too much carved marble hall  
Where one false wing beat would have brought  
down all,  
Came tamely back in front of me, the Drover,  
To suffer the same driven nightmare over.  
One such storm in a lifetime couldn't teach them  
That back behind pursuit it couldn't reach them;  
None flew behind me to be left alone.

Well, something for a snowstorm to have shown  
The country's singing strength thus brought together,  
That though repressed and moody with the weather  
Was none the less there ready to be freed  
And sing the wildflowers up from root and seed.

## THE NEED OF BEING VERSED IN COUNTRY THINGS

The house had gone to bring again  
To the midnight sky a sunset glow.  
Now the chimney was all of the house that stood,  
Like a pistil after the petals go.

The barn opposed across the way,  
That would have joined the house in flame  
Had it been the will of the wind, was left  
To bear forsaken the place's name.

No more it opened with all one end  
For teams that came by the stony road  
To drum on the floor with scurrying hoofs  
And brush the mow with the summer load.

The birds that came to it through the air  
At broken windows flew out and in,  
Their murmur more like the sigh we sigh  
From too much dwelling on what has been.

Yet for them the lilac renewed its leaf,  
And the aged elm, though touched with fire;  
And the dry pump flung up an awkward arm;  
And the fence post carried a strand of wire.

For them there was really nothing sad.  
But though they rejoiced in the nest they kept,  
One had to be versed in country things  
Not to believe the phoebes wept.

*West-Running Brook*



## SPRING POOLS

These pools that, though in forests, still reflect  
The total sky almost without defect,  
And like the flowers beside them, chill and shiver,  
Will like the flowers beside them soon be gone,  
And yet not out by any brook or river,  
But up by roots to bring dark foliage on.

The trees that have it in their pent-up buds  
To darken nature and be summer woods—  
Let them think twice before they use their powers  
To blot out and drink up and sweep away  
These flowery waters and these watery flowers  
From snow that melted only yesterday.

## THE FREEDOM OF THE MOON

I've tried the new moon tilted in the air  
Above a hazy tree-and-farmhouse cluster  
As you might try a jewel in your hair.  
I've tried it fine with little breadth of lustre,  
Alone, or in one ornament combining  
With one first-water star almost as shining.

I put it shining anywhere I please.  
By walking slowly on some evening later,  
I've pulled it from a crate of crooked trees,  
And brought it over glossy water, greater,  
And dropped it in, and seen the image wallow,  
The color run, all sorts of wonder follow.

## FIREFLIES IN THE GARDEN

Here come real stars to fill the upper skies,  
And here on earth come emulating flies,  
That though they never equal stars in size,  
(And they were never really stars at heart)  
Achieve at times a very star-like start.  
Only, of course, they can't sustain the part.



## ATMOSPHERE

### INSCRIPTION FOR A GARDEN WALL

Winds blow the open grassy places bleak;  
But where this old wall burns a sunny cheek,  
They eddy over it too toppling weak  
To blow the earth or anything self-clear;  
Moisture and color and odor thicken here.  
The hours of daylight gather atmosphere.

## DEVOTION

The heart can think of no devotion  
Greater than being shore to the ocean—  
Holding the curve of one position,  
Counting an endless repetition.

## ON GOING UNNOTICED

As vain to raise a voice as a sigh  
In the tumult of free leaves on high.  
What are you in the shadow of trees  
Engaged up there with the light and breeze?

Less than the coral-root you know  
That is content with the daylight low,  
And has no leaves at all of its own;  
Whose spotted flowers hang meanly down

You grasp the bark by a rugged pleat,  
And look up small from the forest's feet.  
The only leaf it drops goes wide,  
Your name not written on either side.

You linger your little hour and are gone,  
And still the woods sweep leafily on,  
Not even missing the coral-root flower  
You took as a trophy of the hour.

## A PASSING GLIMPSE

To Ridgely Torrence  
On Last Looking Into His 'Hesperides'

I often see flowers from a passing car  
That are gone before I can tell what they are.

I want to get out of the train and go back  
To see what they were beside the track.

I name all the flowers I am sure they weren't:  
Not fireweed loving where woods have burnt—

Not blue bells gracing a tunnel mouth—  
Not lupine living on sand and drouth.

Was something brushed across my mind  
That no one on earth will ever find?

Heaven gives its glimpses only to those  
Not in position to look too close.

## A PECK OF GOLD

Dust always blowing about the town,  
Except when sea-fog laid it down,  
And I was one of the children told  
Some of the blowing dust was gold.

All the dust the wind blew high  
Appeared like gold in the sunset sky,  
But I was one of the children told  
Some of the dust was really gold.

Such was life in the Golden Gate:  
Gold dusted all we drank and ate,  
And I was one of the children told,  
'We all must eat our peck of gold.'

## ACCEPTANCE

When the spent sun throws up its rays on cloud  
And goes down burning into the gulf below,  
No voice in nature is heard to cry aloud  
At what has happened. Birds, at least, must know  
It is the change to darkness in the sky.  
Murmuring something quiet in her breast,  
One bird begins to close a faded eye;  
Or overtaken too far from his nest,  
Hurrying low above the grove, some waif  
Swoops just in time to his remembered tree.  
At most he thinks or twitters softly, 'Safe!  
Now let the night be dark for all of me.  
Let the night be too dark for me to see  
Into the future. Let what will be, be.'

## ONCE BY THE PACIFIC

The shattered water made a misty din.  
Great waves looked over others coming in,  
And thought of doing something to the shore  
That water never did to land before.  
The clouds were low and hairy in the skies,  
Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.  
You could not tell, and yet it looked as if  
The shore was lucky in being backed by cliff,  
The cliff in being backed by continent;  
It looked as if a night of dark intent  
Was coming, and not only a night, an age.  
Someone had better be prepared for rage.  
There would be more than ocean-water broken  
Before God's last *Put out the Light* was spoken.

## LODGED

The rain to the wind said  
‘You push and I’ll pelt.’  
They so smote the garden bed  
That the flowers actually knelt,  
And lay lodged—though not dead.  
I know how the flowers felt.



## A MINOR BIRD

I have wished a bird would fly away,  
And not sing by my house all day;

Have clapped my hands at him from the door  
When it seemed as if I could bear no more.

The fault must partly have been in me.  
The bird was not to blame for his key.

And of course there must be something wrong  
In wanting to silence any song.

## BEREFT

Where had I heard this wind before  
Change like this to a deeper roar?  
What would it take my standing there for,  
Holding open a restive door,  
Looking down hill to a frothy shore?  
Summer was past and day was past.  
Sombre clouds in the west were massed.  
Out in the porch's sagging floor,  
Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,  
Blindly struck at my knee and missed.  
Something sinister in the tone  
Told me my secret must be known:  
Word I was in the house alone  
Somehow must have gotten abroad,  
Word I was in my life alone,  
Word I had no one left but God.

## TREE AT MY WINDOW

Tree at my window, window tree,  
My sash is lowered when night comes on;  
But let there never be curtain drawn  
Between you and me.

Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground,  
And thing next most diffuse to cloud,  
Not all your light tongues talking aloud  
Could be profound.

But tree, I have seen you taken and tossed,  
And if you have seen me when I slept,  
You have seen me when I was taken and swept  
And all but lost.

That day she put our heads together,  
Fate had her imagination about her,  
Your head so much concerned with outer,  
Mine with inner, weather.

## THE PEACEFUL SHEPHERD

If heaven were to do again,  
And on the pasture bars,  
I leaned to line the figures in  
Between the dotted stars,

I should be tempted to forget,  
I fear, the Crown of Rule,  
The Scales of Trade, the Cross of Faith,  
As hardly worth renewal.

For these have governed in our lives,  
And see how men have warred.  
The Cross, the Crown, the Scales may all  
As well have been the Sword.

## A WINTER EDEN

A winter garden in an alder swamp,  
Where conies now come out to sun and romp,  
As near a paradise as it can be  
And not melt snow or start a dormant tree.

It lifts existence on a plane of snow  
One level higher than the earth below,  
One level nearer heaven overhead,  
And last year's berries shining scarlet red.

It lifts a gaunt luxuriating beast  
Where he can stretch and hold his highest feast  
On some wild apple tree's young tender bark,  
What well may prove the year's high girdle mark.

So near to paradise all pairing ends:  
Here loveless birds now flock as winter friends,  
Content with bud-inspecting. They presume  
To say which buds are leaf and which are bloom.

A feather-hammer gives a double knock.  
This Eden day is done at two o'clock.  
An hour of winter day might seem too short  
To make it worth life's while to wake and sport.

## THE FLOOD

Blood has been harder to dam back than water.  
Just when we think we have it impounded safe  
Behind new barrier walls (and let it chafe!),  
It breaks away in some new kind of slaughter.  
We choose to say it is let loose by the devil;  
But power of blood itself releases blood.  
It goes by might of being such a flood  
Held high at so unnatural a level.  
It will have outlet, brave and not so brave.  
Weapons of war and implements of peace  
Are but the points at which it finds release.  
And now it is once more the tidal wave  
That when it has swept by leaves summits stained.  
Oh, blood will out. It cannot be contained.

## ACQUAINTED WITH THE NIGHT

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet  
When far away an interrupted cry  
Came over houses from another street,

But not to call me back or say good-bye;  
And further still at an unearthly height,  
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right  
I have been one acquainted with the night.

## THE LOVELY SHALL BE CHOOSERS

The Voice said, 'Hurl her down!'

The Voices, 'How far down?'

'Seven levels of the world.'

'How much time have we?'

'Take twenty years.

She *would* refuse love safe with wealth and honor!

The lovely shall be choosers, shall they?

Then let them choose!'

'Then we shall let her choose?'

'Yes, let her choose.

Take up the task beyond her choosing.'

Invisible hands crowded on her shoulder

In readiness to weigh upon her.

But she stood straight still,

In broad round ear-rings, gold and jet with pearls

And broad round suchlike brooch,

Her cheeks high colored,

Proud and the pride of friends.

The Voice asked, 'You can let her choose?'



'Yes, we can let her and still triumph.'

'Do it by joys, and leave her always blameless.  
Be her first joy her wedding,  
That though a wedding,  
Is yet—well something they know, he and she.  
And after that her next joy  
That though she grieves, her grief is secret:  
Those friends know nothing of her grief to make it  
shameful  
Her third joy that though now they cannot help but  
know,  
They move in pleasure too far off  
To think much or much care.  
Give her a child at either knee for fourth joy  
To tell once and once only, for them never to forget,  
How once she walked in brightness,  
And make them see it in the winter firelight.  
But give her friends for then she dare not tell  
For their foregone incredulousness  
And be her next joy this:  
Her never having deigned to tell them.  
Make her among the humblest even  
Seem to them less than they are.  
Hopeless of being known for what she has been,  
Failing of being loved for what she is,  
Give her the comfort for her sixth of knowing  
She fails from strangeness to a way of life  
She came to from too high too late to learn.  
Then send some *one* with eyes to see

And wonder at her where she is,  
And words to wonder in her hearing how she came  
there,  
But without time to linger for her story.  
Be her last joy her heart's going out to this one  
So that she almost speaks.  
You know them—seven in all.'

'Trust us,' the Voices said.

## WEST-RUNNING BROOK

‘Fred, where is north?’

‘North? North is there, my love.  
The brook runs west.’

‘West-running Brook then call it.’  
(West-running Brook men call it to this day.)  
‘What does it think it’s doing running west  
When all the other country brooks flow east  
To reach the ocean? It must be the brook  
Can trust itself to go by contraries  
The way I can with you—and you with me—  
Because we’re—we’re—I don’t know what we are.  
What are we?’

‘Young or new?’

‘We must be something.  
We’ve said we two. Let’s change that to we three.  
As you and I are married to each other,  
We’ll both be married to the brook. We’ll build  
Our bridge across it, and the bridge shall be  
Our arm thrown over it asleep beside it.  
Look, look, it’s waving to us with a wave  
To let us know it hears me.’

‘Why, my dear,  
That wave’s been standing off this jut of shore—’  
(The black stream, catching on a sunken rock,  
Flung backward on itself in one white wave,  
And the white water rode the black forever,  
Not gaining but not losing, like a bird  
White feathers from the struggle of whose breast  
Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darker pool  
Below the point, and were at last driven wrinkled  
In a white scarf against the far shore alders.)  
‘That wave’s been standing off this jut of shore  
Ever since rivers, I was going to say,  
Were made in heaven. It wasn’t waved to us.’

‘It wasn’t, yet it was. If not to you  
It was to me—in an annunciation.’

‘Oh, if you take it off to lady-land,  
As’t were the country of the Amazons  
We men must see you to the confines of  
And leave you there, ourselves forbid to enter,—  
It is your brook! I have no more to say.’

‘Yes, you have, too. Go on. You thought of something.’

‘Speaking of contraries, see how the brook  
In that white wave runs counter to itself.  
It is from that in water we were from

Long, long before we were from any creature.  
Here we, in our impatience of the steps,  
Get back to the beginning of beginnings,  
The stream of everything that runs away.  
Some say existence like a Pirouot  
And Pirouette, forever in one place,  
Stands still and dances, but it runs away,  
It seriously, sadly, runs away  
To fill the abyss' void with emptiness.  
It flows beside us in this water brook,  
But it flows over us. It flows between us  
To separate us for a panic moment.  
It flows between us, over us, and *with* us.  
And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love—  
And even substance lapsing unsubstantial;  
The universal cataract of death  
That spends to nothingness—and unresisted,  
Save by some strange resistance in itself,  
Not just a swerving, but a throwing back,  
As if regret were in it and were sacred.  
It has this throwing backward on itself  
So that the fall of most of it is always  
Raising a little, sending up a little.  
Our life runs down in sending up the clock.  
The brook runs down in sending up our life.  
The sun runs down in sending up the brook.  
And there is something sending up the sun.  
It is this backward motion toward the source,  
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,  
The tribute of the current to the source.

It is from this in nature we are from.  
It is most us.'

                                'Today will be the day  
You said so.'

                                'No, today will be the day  
You said the brook was called West-running Brook.'

'Today will be the day of what we both said.'

## SAND DUNES

Sea waves are green and wet,  
But up from where they die,  
Rise others vaster yet,  
And those are brown and dry.

They are the sea made land  
To come at the fisher town,  
And bury in solid sand  
The men she could not drown.

She may know cove and cape,  
But she does not know mankind  
If by any change of shape,  
She hopes to cut off mind.

Men left her a ship to sink:  
They can leave her a hut as well;  
And be but more free to think  
For the one more cast off shell.

## CANIS MAJOR

The great Overdog,  
That heavenly beast  
With a star in one eye,  
Gives a leap in the east.

He dances upright  
All the way to the west  
And never once drops  
On his forefeet to rest.

I'm a poor underdog,  
But tonight I will bark  
With the great Overdog  
That romps through the dark.



## A SOLDIER

He is that fallen lance that lies as hurled,  
That lies unlifted now, come dew, come rust,  
But still lies pointed as it plowed the dust.  
If we who sight along it round the world,  
See nothing worthy to have been its mark,  
It is because like men we look too near,  
Forgetting that as fitted to the sphere,  
Our missiles always make too short an arc.  
They fall, they rip the grass, they intersect  
The curve of earth, and striking, break their own;  
They make us cringe for metal-point on stone.  
But this we know, the obstacle that checked  
And tripped the body, shot the spirit on  
Further than target ever showed or shone.

## IMMIGRANTS

No ship of all that under sail or steam  
Have gathered people to us more and more  
But Pilgrim-manned the Mayflower in a dream  
Has been her anxious convey in to shore.

## HANNIBAL

Was there ever a cause too lost,  
Ever a cause that was lost too long,  
Or that showed with the lapse of time too vain  
For the generous tears of youth and song?

## THE FLOWER BOAT

The fisherman's swapping a yarn for a yarn  
Under the hand of the village barber,  
And here in the angle of house and barn  
His deep-sea dory has found a harbor.

At anchor she rides the sunny sod  
As full to the gunnel of flowers growing  
As ever she turned her home with cod  
From George's bank when winds were blowing.

And I judge from that Elysian freight  
That all they ask is rougher weather,  
And dory and master will sail by fate  
To seek for the Happy Isles together.

## THE TIMES TABLE

More than half way up the pass  
Was a spring with a broken drinking glass,  
And whether the farmer drank or not  
His mare was sure to observe the spot  
By cramping the wheel on a water-bar,  
Turning her forehead with a star,  
And straining her ribs for a monster sigh;  
To which the farmer would make reply,  
'A sigh for every so many breath,  
And for every so many sigh a death.  
That's what I always tell my wife  
Is the multiplication table of life.'  
The saying may be ever so true;  
But it's just the kind of a thing that you,  
Nor I, nor nobody else may say,  
Unless our purpose is doing harm,  
And then I know of no better way  
'To close a road, abandon a farm,  
Reduce the births of the human race,  
And bring back nature in people's place.

## THE INVESTMENT

Over back where they speak of life as staying  
(‘You couldn’t call it living, for it ain’t’),  
There was an old, old house renewed with paint,  
And in it a piano loudly playing.

Out in the ploughed ground in the cold a digger,  
Among unearthed potatoes standing still,  
Was counting winter dinners, one a hill,  
With half an ear to the piano’s vigor.

All that piano and new paint back there,  
Was it some money suddenly come into?  
Or some extravagance young love had been to?  
Or old love on an impulse not to care—

Not to sink under being man and wife,  
But get some color and music out of life?

## THE LAST MOWING

There's a place called Far-away Meadow  
We never shall mow in again,  
Or such is the talk at the farmhouse:  
The meadow is finished with men.  
Then now is the chance for the flowers  
That can't stand mowers and plowers.  
It must be now, though, in season  
Before the not mowing brings trees on,  
Before trees, seeing the opening,  
March into a shadowy claim.  
The trees are all I'm afraid of,  
That flowers can't bloom in the shade of;  
It's no more men I'm afraid of;  
The meadow is done with the tame.  
The place for the moment is ours  
For you, oh tumultuous flowers,  
To go to waste and go wild in,  
All shapes and colors of flowers,  
I needn't call you by name.

## THE BIRTHPLACE

Here further up the mountain slope  
Than there was ever any hope,  
My father built, enclosed a spring,  
Strung chains of wall round everything,  
Subdued the growth of earth to grass,  
And brought our various lives to pass.  
A dozen girls and boys we were.  
The mountain seemed to like the stir,  
And made of us a little while—  
With always something in her smile.  
Today she wouldn't know our name.  
(No girl's, of course, has stayed the same.)  
The mountain pushed us off her knees.  
And now her lap is full of trees.



## DUST IN THE EYES

If, as they say, some dust thrown in my eyes  
Will keep my talk from getting overwise,  
I'm not the one for putting off the proof.  
Let it be overwhelming, off a roof  
And round a corner, blizzard snow for dust  
And blind me to a standstill if it must.

## SITTING BY A BUSH IN BROAD SUNLIGHT

When I spread out my hand here today,  
I catch no more than a ray  
To feel of between thumb and fingers;  
No lasting effect of it lingers.

There was one time and only the one  
When dust really took in the sun;  
And from that one intake of fire  
All creatures still warmly suspire.

And if men have watched a long time  
And never seen sun-smitten slime  
Again come to life and crawl off,  
We must not be too ready to scoff.

God once declared he was true  
And then took the veil and withdrew,  
And remember how final a hush  
Then descended of old on the bush.

God once spoke to people by name.  
The sun once imparted its flame  
One impulse persists as our breath;  
The other persists as our faith.

## WHAT FIFTY SAID

When I was young my teachers were the old.  
I gave up fire for form till I was cold.  
I suffered like a metal being cast.  
I went to school to age to learn the past.

Now I am old my teachers are the young.  
What can't be moulded must be cracked and sprung.  
I strain at lessons fit to start a suture.  
I go to school to youth to learn the future.

## RIDERS

The surest thing there is is we are riders,  
And though none too successful at it, guiders,  
Through everything presented, land and tide  
And now the very air, of what we ride.

What is this talked-of mystery of birth  
But being mounted bareback on the earth?  
We can just see the infant up astride,  
His small fist buried in the bushy hide.

There is our wildest mount—a headless horse.  
But though it runs unbridled off its course,  
And all our blandishments would seem defied,  
We have ideas yet that we haven't tried.

## ON LOOKING UP BY CHANCE AT THE CONSTELLATIONS

You'll wait a long, long time for anything much  
To happen in heaven beyond the floats of cloud  
And the Northern Lights that run like tingling  
nerves.

The sun and moon get crossed, but they never  
touch,  
Nor strike out fire from each other, nor crash out  
loud.

The planets seem to interfere in their curves,  
But nothing ever happens, no harm is done.  
We may as well go patiently on with our life,  
And look elsewhere than to stars and moon and sun  
For the shocks and changes we need to keep us sane.  
It is true the longest drouth will end in rain,  
The longest peace in China will end in strife.  
Still it wouldn't reward the watcher to stay awake  
In hopes of seeing the calm of heaven break  
On his particular time and personal sight.  
That calm seems certainly safe to last tonight.

## THE BEAR

The bear puts both arms around the tree above her  
And draws it down as if it were a lover  
And its choke cherries lips to kiss good-bye,  
Then lets it snap back upright in the sky.  
Her next step rocks a boulder on the wall  
(She's making her cross-country in the fall).  
Her great weight creaks the barbed-wire in its staples  
As she flings over and off down through the maples,  
Leaving on one wire tooth a lock of hair.  
Such is the uncaged progress of the bear.  
The world has room to make a bear feel free;  
The universe seems cramped to you and me.  
Man acts more like the poor bear in a cage  
That all day fights a nervous inward rage,  
His mood rejecting all his mind suggests.  
He paces back and forth and never rests  
The toe-nail click and shuffle of his feet,  
The telescope at one end of his beat,  
And at the other end the microscope,  
Two instruments of nearly equal hope,  
And in conjunction giving quite a spread.  
Or if he rests from scientific tread,  
'Tis only to sit back and sway his head  
Through ninety odd degrees of arc, it seems,  
Between two metaphysical extremes.  
He sits back on his fundamental butt  
With lifted snout and eyes (if any) shut,

(He almost looks religious but he's not),  
And back and forth he sways from cheek to cheek,  
At one extreme agreeing with one Greek,  
At the other agreeing with another Greek  
Which may be thought, but only so to speak.  
A baggy figure, equally pathetic  
When sedentary and when peripatetic.

## THE EGG AND THE MACHINE

He gave the solid rail a hateful kick.  
From far away there came an answering tick  
And then another tick. He knew the code:  
His hate had roused an engine up the road.  
He wished when he had had the track alone  
He had attacked it with a club or stone  
And bent some rail wide open like a switch  
So as to wreck the engine in the ditch.  
Too late though, now, he had himself to thank.  
Its click was rising to a nearer clank.  
Here it came breasting like a horse in skirts.  
(He stood well back for fear of scalding squirts.)  
Then for a moment all there was was size  
Confusion and a roar that drowned the cries  
He raised against the gods in the machine.  
Then once again the sandbank lay serene.  
The traveler's eye picked up a turtle trail,  
Between the dotted feet a streak of tail,  
And followed it to where he made out vague  
But certain signs of buried turtle's egg;  
And probing with one finger not too rough,  
He found suspicious sand, and sure enough,  
The pocket of a little turtle mine.  
If there was one egg in it there were nine,  
Torpedo-like, with shell of gritty leather  
All packed in sand to wait the trump together.  
'You'd better not disturb me any more,'



He told the distance, 'I am armed for war.  
The next machine that has the power to pass  
Will get this plasm in its goggle glass.'

*A Further Range*



## A LONE STRIKER

The swinging mill bell changed its rate  
To tolling like the count of fate,  
And though at that the tardy ran,  
One failed to make the closing gate.  
There was a law of God or man  
That on the one who came too late  
The gate for half an hour be locked,  
His time be lost, his pittance docked.  
He stood rebuked and unemployed.  
The straining mill began to shake.  
The mill, though many, many eyed,  
Had eyes inscrutably opaque;  
So that he couldn't look inside  
To see if some forlorn machine  
Was standing idle for his sake.  
(He couldn't hope its heart would break.)

And yet he thought he saw the scene:  
The air was full of dust of wool.  
A thousand yarns were under pull,  
But pull so slow, with such a twist,  
All day from spool to lesser spool,  
It seldom overtaxed their strength;  
They safely grew in slender length.  
And if one broke by any chance,  
The spinner saw it at a glance.  
The spinner still was there to spin.

That's where the human still came in.  
Her deft hand showed with finger rings  
Among the harp-like spread of strings.  
She caught the pieces end to end  
And, with a touch that never missed,  
Not so much tied as made them blend.  
Man's ingenuity was good.  
He saw it plainly where he stood,  
Yet found it easy to resist.

He knew another place, a wood,  
And in it, tall as trees, were cliffs;  
And if he stood on one of these,  
'Twould be among the tops of trees,  
Their upper branches round him wreathing,  
Their breathing mingled with his breathing.  
If—if he stood! Enough of ifs!  
He knew a path that wanted walking;  
He knew a spring that wanted drinking;  
A thought that wanted further thinking;  
A love that wanted re-renewing.  
Nor was this just a way of talking  
To save him the expense of doing.  
With him it boded action, deed.

The factory was very fine;  
He wished it all the modern speed.  
Yet, after all, 'twas not divine,  
That is to say, 'twas not a church.  
He never would assume that he'd

Be any institution's need.  
But he said then and still would say  
If there should ever come a day  
When industry seemed like to die  
Because he left it in the lurch,  
Or even merely seemed to pine  
For want of his approval, why  
Come get him—they knew where to search.

## TWO TRAMPS IN MUD TIME

Out of the mud two strangers came  
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.  
And one of them put me off my aim  
By hailing cheerily 'Hit them hard!'  
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind  
And let the other go on a way.  
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:  
He wanted to take my job for pay.

Good blocks of beech it was I split,  
As large around as the chopping block;  
And every piece I squarely hit  
Fell splinterless as a cloven rock.  
The blows that a life of self-control  
Spares to strike for the common good  
That day, giving a loose to my soul,  
I spent on the unimportant wood.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.  
You know how it is with an April day  
When the sun is out and the wind is still,  
You're one month on in the middle of May.  
But if you so much as dare to speak,  
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,  
A wind comes off a frozen peak,  
And you're two months back in the middle of  
March.

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight  
And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume  
His song so pitched as not to excite  
A single flower as yet to bloom.

It is snowing a flake: and he half knew  
Winter was only playing possum.  
Except in color he isn't blue,  
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

The water for which we may have to look  
In summertime with a witching-wand,  
In every wheelrut's now a brook,  
In every print of a hoof a pond.  
Be glad of water, but don't forget  
The lurking frost in the earth beneath  
That will steal forth after the sun is set  
And show on the water its crystal teeth.

The time when most I loved my task  
These two must make me love it more  
By coming with what they came to ask.  
You'd think I never had felt before  
The weight of an ax-head poised aloft,  
The grip on earth of outspread feet.  
The life of muscles rocking soft  
And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

Out of the woods two hulking tramps  
(From sleeping God knows where last night, \



But not long since in the lumber camps).  
They thought all chopping was theirs of right.  
Men of the woods and lumberjacks,  
They judged me by their appropriate tool.  
Except as a fellow handled an ax,  
They had no way of knowing a fool.

Nothing on either side was said.  
They knew they had but to stay their stay  
And all their logic would fill my head:  
As that I had no right to play  
With what was another man's work for gain.  
My right might be love but theirs was need.  
And where the two exist in twain  
Theirs was the better right—agreed.

But yield who will to their separation,  
My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight.  
Only where love and need are one,  
And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
Is the deed ever really done  
For Heaven and the future's sakes.

## THE WHITE-TAILED HORNET

The white-tailed hornet lives in a balloon  
That floats against the ceiling of the woodshed.  
The exit he comes out at like a bullet  
Is like the pupil of a pointed gun.  
And having power to change his aim in flight,  
He comes out more unerring than a bullet.  
Verse could be written on the certainty  
With which he penetrates my best defense  
Of whirling hands and arms about the head  
To stab me in the sneeze-nerve of a nostril.  
Such is the instinct of it I allow.  
Yet how about the insect certainty  
That in the neighborhood of home and children  
Is such an execrable judge of motives  
As not to recognize in me the exception  
I like to think I am in everything—  
One who would never hang above a bookcase  
His Japanese crepe-paper globe for trophy?  
He stung me first and stung me afterward.  
He rolled me off the field head over heels,  
And would not listen to my explanations.

That's when I went as visitor to his house.  
As visitor at my house he is better.  
Hawking for flies about the kitchen door,  
In at one door perhaps and out another,  
Trust him then not to put you in the wrong.

He won't misunderstand your freest movements.  
Let him light on your skin unless you mind  
So many prickly grappling feet at once.  
He's after the domesticated fly  
To feed his thumping grubs as big as he is.  
Here he is at his best, but even here—  
I watched him where he swooped, he pounced, he  
struck;  
But what he found he had was just a nailhead.  
He struck a second time. Another nailhead.  
'Those are just nailheads. Those are fastened down.'  
Then disconcerted and not unannoyed,  
He stooped and struck a little huckleberry  
The way a player curls around a football.  
'Wrong shape, wrong color, and wrong scent,' I said.  
The huckleberry rolled him on his head.  
At last it was a fly. He shot and missed;  
And the fly circled round him in derision.  
But for the fly he might have made me think  
He had been at his poetry, comparing  
Nailhead with fly and fly with huckleberry:  
How like a fly, how very like a fly.  
But the real fly he missed would never do;  
The missed fly made me dangerously skeptic.

Won't this whole instinct matter bear revision?  
Won't almost any theory bear revision?  
To err is human, not to, animal.  
Or so we pay the compliment to instinct,  
Only too liberal of our compliment

That really takes away instead of gives.  
Our worship, humor, conscientiousness  
Went long since to the dogs under the table.  
And served us right for having instituted  
Downward comparisons. As long on earth  
As our comparisons were stoutly upward  
With gods and angels, we were men at least,  
But little lower than the gods and angels.  
But once comparisons were yielded downward,  
Once we began to see our images  
Reflected in the mud and even dust,  
'Twas disillusion upon disillusion.  
We were lost piecemeal to the animals,  
Like people thrown out to delay the wolves.  
Nothing but fallibility was left us,  
And this day's work made even that seem doubtful.

## A BLUE RIBBON AT AMESBURY

Such a fine pullet ought to go  
All coiffured to a winter show,  
And be exhibited, and win.  
The answer is this one has been—

And come with all her honors home.  
Her golden leg, her coral comb,  
Her fluff of plumage, white as chalk,  
Her style, were all the fancy's talk.

It seems as if you must have heard.  
She scored an almost perfect bird.  
In her we make ourselves acquainted.  
With one a Sewell might have painted.

Here common with the flock again,  
At home in her abiding pen,  
She lingers feeding at the trough,  
The last to let night drive her off.

The one who gave her ankle-band,  
Her keeper, empty pail in hand,  
He lingers too, averse to slight  
His chores for all the wintry night.

He leans against the dusty wall,  
Immured almost beyond recall,

A depth past many swinging doors  
And many litter-muffled floors.

He meditates the breeder's art.  
He has a half a mind to start,  
With her for Mother Eve, a race  
That shall all living things displace.

'Tis ritual with her to lay  
The full six days, then rest a day;  
At which rate barring broodiness  
She well may score an egg-success.

The gatherer can always tell  
Her well-turned egg's brown sturdy shell,  
As safe a vehicle of seed  
As is vouchsafed to feathered breed.

No human spectre at the feast  
Can scant or hurry her the least.  
She takes her time to take her fill.  
She whets a sleepy sated bill.

She gropes across the pen alone  
To peck herself a precious stone.  
She waters at the patient fount.  
And so to roost, the last to mount.

The roost is her extent of flight.  
Yet once she rises to the height,

She shoulders with a wing so strong  
She makes the whole flock move along.

The night is setting in to blow.  
It scours the windowpane with snow,  
But barely gets from them or her  
For comment a complacent chirr.

The lowly pen is yet a hold  
Against the dark and wind and cold  
To give a prospect to a plan  
And warrant prudence in a man.

## A DRUMLIN WOODCHUCK

One thing has a shelving bank,  
Another a rotting plank,  
To give it cozier skies  
And make up for its lack of size.

My own strategic retreat  
Is where two rocks almost meet,  
And still more secure and snug,  
A two-door burrow I dug.

With those in mind at my back  
I can sit forth exposed to attack  
As one who shrewdly pretends  
That he and the world are friends.

All we who prefer to live  
Have a little whistle we give,  
And flash, at the least alarm  
We dive down under the farm.

We allow some time for guile  
And don't come out for a while  
Either to eat or drink.  
We take occasion to think.

And if after the hunt goes past  
And the double-barrelled blast



(Like war and pestilence  
And the loss of common sense),

If I can with confidence say  
That still for another day,  
Or even another year,  
I will be there for you, my dear,

It will be because, though small  
As measured again the All,  
I have been so instinctively thorough  
About my crevice and burrow.

## THE GOLD HESPERIDEE

Square Matthew Hale's young grafted appletree  
Began to blossom at the age of five;  
And after having entertained the bee,  
And cast its flowers and all the stems but three,  
It set itself to keep those three alive;  
And downy wax the three began to thrive.

They had just given themselves a little twist  
And turned from looking up and being kissed  
To looking down and yet not being sad,  
When came Square Hale with Let's see what we had;  
And two was all he counted (one he missed);  
But two for a beginning wasn't bad.

His little Matthew, also five years old,  
Was led into the presence of the tree  
And raised among the leaves and duly told,  
We mustn't touch them yet, but see and see!  
And what was green would by and by be gold.  
Their name was called the Gold Hesperidee.

As regularly as he went to feed the pig  
Or milk the cow, he visited the fruit,  
The dew of night and morning on his boot.  
Dearer to him than any barnyard brute,  
Each swung in danger on its slender twig,  
A bubble on a pipe-stem growing big.

Long since they swung as three instead of two—  
One more, he thought, to take him safely through.  
Three made it certain nothing Fate could do  
With codlin moth or rusty parasite  
Would keep him now from proving with a bite  
That the name Gold Hesperidee was right.

And so he brought them to the verge of frost.  
But one day when the foliage all went swish  
With autumn and the fruit was rudely tossed,  
He thought no special goodness could be lost  
If he fulfilled at last his summer wish,  
And saw them picked unbruised and in a dish,

Where they could ripen safely to the eating.  
But when he came to look, no apples there  
Under, or on the tree, or anywhere,  
And the light-natured tree seemed not to care!  
'Twas Sunday and Square Hale was dressed for  
meeting,  
The final summons into church was beating.

Just as he was without an uttered sound  
At those who'd done him such a wrong as that,  
Square Matthew Hale took off his Sunday hat  
And ceremoniously laid it on the ground,  
And leaping on it with a solemn bound,  
Danced slowly on it till he trod it flat.

Then suddenly he saw the thing he did,  
And looked around to see if he was seen.  
This was the sin that Ahaz was forbid  
(The meaning of the passage had been hid):  
To look upon the tree when it was green  
And worship apples. What else could it mean?

God saw him dancing in the orchard path,  
But mercifully kept the passing crowd  
From witnessing the fault of one so proud.  
And so the story wasn't told in Gath;  
In gratitude for which Square Matthew vowed  
To walk a graver man restrained in wrath.

## IN TIME OF CLOUDBURST

Let the downpour roil and toil!  
The worst it can do to me  
Is carry some garden soil  
A little nearer the sea.

'Tis the world-old way of the rain  
When it comes to a mountain farm  
To exact for a present gain  
A little of future harm.

And the harm is none too sure,  
For when all that was rotted rich  
Shall be in the end scoured poor,  
When my garden has gone down ditch,

Some force has but to apply,  
And summits shall be immersed,  
The bottom of seas raised dry—  
The slope of the earth reversed.

Then all I need do is run  
To the other end of the slope,  
And on tracts laid new to the sun,  
Begin all over to hope.

Some worn old tool of my own  
'Will be turned up by the plow,

The wood of it changed to stone,  
But as ready to wield as now.

May my application so close  
To so endless a repetition  
Not make me tired and morose  
And resentful of man's condition.

## A ROADSIDE STAND

The little old house was out with a little new shed  
In front at the edge of the road where the traffic sped,  
A roadside stand that too pathetically plead,  
It would not be fair to say for a dole of bread,  
But for some of the money, the cash, whose flow  
supports

The flower of cities from sinking and withering faint.  
The polished traffic passed with a mind ahead,  
Or if ever aside a moment, then out of sorts  
At having the landscape marred with the artless paint  
Of signs that with N turned wrong and S turned  
wrong

Offered for sale wild berries in wooden quarts,  
Or crook-necked golden squash with silver warts,  
Or beauty rest in a beautiful mountain scene.  
You have the money, but if you want to be mean,  
Why keep your money (this crossly), and go along.  
The hurt to the scenery wouldn't be my complaint  
So much as the trusting sorrow of what is unsaid:  
Here far from the city we make our roadside stand  
And ask for some city money to feel in hand  
To try if it will not make our being expand,  
And give us the life of the moving pictures' promise  
That the party in power is said to be keeping from us.

It is in the news that all these pitiful kin  
Are to be bought out and mercifully gathered in  
To live in villages next to the theatre and store

Where they won't have to think for themselves any  
more;

While greedy good-doers, beneficent beasts of prey,  
Swarm over their lives enforcing benefits  
That are calculated to soothe them out of their wits,  
And by teaching them how to sleep the sleep all day,  
Destroy their sleeping at night the ancient way.

Sometimes I feel myself I can hardly bear  
The thought of so much childish longing in vain,  
The sadness that lurks near the open window there,  
That waits all day in almost open prayer  
For the squeal of brakes, the sound of a stopping car,  
Of all the thousand selfish cars that pass,  
Just one to inquire what a farmer's prices are.  
And one did stop, but only to plow up grass  
In using the yard to back and turn around;  
And another to ask the way to where it was bound;  
And another to ask could they sell it a gallon of gas  
They couldn't (this crossly): they had none, didn't  
it see?

No, in country money, the country scale of gain,  
The requisite lift of spirit has never been found,  
Or so the voice of the country seems to complain.  
I can't help owning the great relief it would be  
To put these people at one stroke out of their pain.  
And then next day as I come back into the sane,  
I wonder how I should like you to come to me  
And offer to put me gently out of my pain.



## DEPARTMENTAL

An ant on the table cloth  
Ran into a dormant moth  
Of many times his size.  
He showed not the least surprise.  
His business wasn't with such.  
He gave it scarcely a touch,  
And was off on his duty run.  
Yet if he encountered one  
Of the hive's enquiry squad  
Whose work is to find out God  
And the nature of time and space,  
He would put him onto the case.  
Ants are a curious race;  
One crossing with hurried tread  
The body of one of their dead  
Isn't given a moment's arrest—  
Seems not even impressed.  
But he no doubt reports to any  
With whom he crosses antennae,  
And they no doubt report  
To the higher up at court.  
Then word goes forth in Formic:  
'Death's come to Jerry McCormic,  
Our selfless forager Jerry.  
Will the special Janizary  
Whose office it is to bury  
The dead of the commissary

Go bring him home to his people.  
Lay him in state on a sepal.  
Wrap him for shroud in a petal.  
Embalm him with ichor of nettle.  
'This is the word of your Queen.'  
And presently on the scene  
Appears a solemn mortician;  
And taking formal position  
With feelers calmly atwiddle,  
Seizes the dead by the middle,  
And heaving him high in air,  
Carries him out of there.  
No one stands round to stare.  
It is nobody else's affair.

It couldn't be called ungentle.  
But how thoroughly departmental.

## ON THE HEART'S BEGINNING TO CLOUD THE MIND

Something I saw or thought I saw  
In the desert at midnight in Utah,  
Looking out of my lower berth  
At moonlit sky and moonlit earth.  
The sky had here and there a star;  
The earth had a single light afar,  
A flickering, human pathetic light,  
That was maintained against the night,  
It seemed to me, by the people there,  
With a God-forsaken brute despair.  
It would flutter and fall in half an hour  
Like the last petal off a flower.  
But my heart was beginning to cloud my mind.  
I knew a tale of a better kind.  
That far light flickers because of trees.  
The people can burn it as long as they please:  
And when their interests in it end,  
They can leave it to someone else to tend.  
Come back that way a summer hence,  
I should find it no more no less intense.  
I pass, but scarcely pass no doubt,  
When one will say, 'Let us put it out.'  
The other without demur agrees.  
They can keep it burning as long as they please;  
They can put it out whenever they please.  
One looks out last from the darkened room

At the shiny desert with spots of gloom  
That might be people and are but cedar,  
Have no purpose, have no leader,  
Have never made the first move to assemble,  
And so are nothing to make her tremble.  
She can think of places that are not thus  
Without indulging a 'Not for us!'  
Life is not so sinister-grave.  
Matter of fact has made them brave.  
He is husband, she is wife.  
She fears not him, they fear not life.  
They know where another light has been  
And more than one to theirs akin,  
But earlier out for bed tonight,  
So lost on me in my surface flight.

This I saw when waking late,  
Going by at a railroad rate,  
Looking through wreaths of engine smoke  
Far into the lives of other folk.

## THE FIGURE IN THE DOORWAY

The grade surmounted, we were riding high  
Through level mountains nothing to the eye  
But scrub oak, scrub oak and the lack of earth  
That kept the oaks from getting any girth.  
But as through the monotony we ran,  
We came to where there was a living man.  
His great gaunt figure filled his cabin door,  
And had he fallen inward on the floor,  
He must have measured to the further wall.  
But we who passed were not to see him fall.  
The miles and miles he lived from anywhere  
Were evidently something he could bear.  
He stood unshaken, and if grim and gaunt,  
It was not necessarily from want.  
He had the oaks for heating and for light.  
He had a hen, he had a pig in sight.  
He had a well, he had the rain to catch.  
He had a ten by twenty garden patch.  
Nor did he lack for common entertainment.  
That I assume was what our passing train meant.  
He could look at us in our diner eating,  
And if so moved uncurl a hand in greeting.

## AT WOODWARD'S GARDENS

A boy, presuming on his intellect,  
Once showed two little monkeys in a cage  
A burning-glass they could not understand  
And never could be made to understand.  
Words are no good: to say it was a lens  
For gathering solar rays would not have helped.  
But let him show them how the weapon worked.  
He made the sun a pin-point on the nose  
Of first one then the other till it brought  
A look of puzzled dimness to their eyes  
That blinking could not seem to blink away.  
They stood arms laced together at the bars,  
And exchanged troubled glances over life.  
One put a thoughtful hand up to his nose  
As if reminded—or as if perhaps  
Within a million years of an idea.  
He got his purple little knuckles stung.  
The already known had once more been confirmed  
By psychological experiment,  
And that were all the finding to announce  
Had the boy not presumed too close and long.  
There was a sudden flash of arm, a snatch  
And the glass was the monkeys' not the boy's.  
Precipitately they retired back cage  
And instituted an investigation  
On their part, though without the needed insight.  
They bit the glass and listened for the flavor.

They broke the handle and the binding off it.  
Then none the wiser, frankly gave it up,  
And having hid it in their bedding straw  
Against the day of prisoners' ennui,  
Came dryly forward to the bars again  
To answer for themselves: Who said it mattered  
What monkeys did or didn't understand?  
They might not understand a burning-glass.  
They might not understand the sun itself.  
It's knowing what to do with things that counts.

## A RECORD STRIDE

In a Vermont bedroom closet  
With a door of two broad boards  
And for back wall a crumbling old chimney  
(And that's what their toes are towards),

I have a pair of shoes standing,  
Old rivals of sagging leather,  
Who once kept surpassing each other,  
But now live even together.

They listen for me in the bedroom  
To ask me a thing or two  
About who is too old to go walking,  
With too much stress on the who.

I wet one last year at Montauk  
For a hat I had to save.  
The other I wet at the Cliff House  
In an extra-vagant wave.

Two entirely different grandchildren  
Got me into my double adventure.  
But when they grow up and can read this  
I hope they won't take it for censure.

I touch my tongue to the shoes now  
And unless my sense is at fault,



On one I can taste Atlantic,  
On the other Pacific, salt.

One foot in each great ocean  
Is a record stride or stretch.  
The authentic shoes it was made in  
I should sell for what they would fetch.

But instead I proudly devote them  
To my museum and muse;  
So the thick-skins needn't act thin-skinned  
About being past-active shoes.

And I ask all to try to forgive me  
For being as over-elated  
As if I had measured the country  
And got the United States stated.

## LOST IN HEAVEN

The clouds, the source of rain, one stormy night  
Offered an opening to the source of dew;  
Which I accepted with impatient sight,  
Looking for my old skymarks in the blue.

But stars were scarce in that part of the sky,  
And no two were of the same constellation—  
No one was bright enough to identify;  
So 'twas with not ungrateful consternation,

Seeing myself well lost once more, I sighed,  
'Where, where in Heaven am I? But don't tell me!'  
I warned the clouds, 'by opening on me wide.  
Let's let my heavenly lostness overwhelm me.'

## DESERT PLACES

Snow falling and night falling fast oh fast  
In a field I looked into going past,  
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,  
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it—it is theirs.  
All animals are smothered in their lairs.  
I am too absent-spirited to count;  
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness  
Will be more lonely ere it will be less—  
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow  
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars—on stars where no human race is.  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.

## LEAVES COMPARED WITH FLOWERS

A tree's leaves may be ever so good,  
So may its bark, so may its wood;  
But unless you put the right thing to its root  
It never will show much flower or fruit.

But I may be one who does not care  
Ever to have tree bloom or bear.  
Leaves for smooth and bark for rough,  
Leaves and bark may be tree enough.

Some giant trees have bloom so small  
They might as well have none at all.  
Late in life I have come on fern.  
Now lichens are due to have their turn.

I bade men tell me which in brief,  
Which is fairer, flower or leaf.  
They did not have the wit to say,  
Leaves by night and flowers by day.

Leaves and bark, leaves and bark,  
To lean against and hear in the dark.  
Petals I may have once pursued.  
Leaves are all my darker mood.

## A LEAF TREADER

I have been treading on leaves all day until I am  
autumn-tired.

God knows all the color and form of leaves I have  
trodden on and mired.

Perhaps I have put forth too much strength and  
been too fierce from fear.

I have safely trodden underfoot the leaves of another  
year.

All summer long they were over head, more lifted  
up than I.

To come to their final place in earth they had to  
pass me by.

All summer long I thought I heard them threatening  
under their breath.

And when they came it seemed with a will to carry  
me with them to death.

They spoke to the fugitive in my heart as if it were  
leaf to leaf.

They tapped at my eyelids and touched my lips  
— with an invitation to grief.

But it was no reason I had to go because they had  
to go.

Now up my knee to keep on top of another year of  
snow.

## THEY WERE WELCOME TO THEIR BELIEF

Grief may have thought it was grief.  
Care may have thought it was care.  
They were welcome to their belief,  
The over important pair.

No, it took all the snows that clung  
To the low roof over his bed,  
Beginning when he was young,  
To induce the one snow on his head.

But whenever the roof came white  
The head in the dark below  
Was a shade less the color of night  
A shade more the color of snow.

Grief may have thought it was grief.  
Care may have thought it was care.  
But neither one was the thief  
Of his raven color of hair.

## THE STRONG ARE SAYING NOTHING

The soil now gets a rumpling soft and damp,  
And small regard to the future of any weed.  
The final flat of the hoe's approval stamp  
Is reserved for the bed of a few selected seed.

There is seldom more than a man to a harrowed  
piece.  
Men work alone, their lots plowed far apart,  
One stringing a chain of seed in an open crease,  
And another stumbling after a halting cart.

To the fresh and black of the squares of early mould  
The leafless bloom of a plum is fresh and white;  
Though there's more than a doubt if the weather is  
not too cold  
For the bees to come and serve its beauty aright.

Wind goes from farm to farm in wave on wave,  
But carries no cry of what is hoped to be.  
There may be little or much beyond the grave,  
But the strong are saying nothing until they see.

## THE MASTER SPEED

No speed of wind or water rushing by  
But you have speed far greater. You can climb  
Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,  
And back through history up the stream of time.  
And you were given this swiftness, not for haste,  
Nor chiefly that you may go where you will,  
But in the rush of everything to waste,  
That you may have the power of standing still—  
Off any still or moving thing you say.  
Two such as you with such a master speed  
Cannot be parted nor be swept away  
From one another once you are agreed  
That life is only life forevermore  
Together wing to wing and oar to oar.



## MOON COMPASSES

I stole forth dimly in the dripping pause  
Between two downpours to see what there was.  
And a masked moon had spread down compass rays  
To a cone mountain in the midnight haze,  
As if the final estimate were hers,  
And as it measured in her calipers,  
The mountain stood exalted in its place.  
So love will take between the hands a face . . .

## NEITHER OUT FAR NOR IN DEEP

The people along the sand  
All turn and look one way.  
They turn their back on the land.  
They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass  
A ship keeps raising its hull;  
The wetter ground like glass  
Reflects a standing gull.

The land may vary more;  
But wherever the truth may be—  
The water comes ashore,  
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.  
They cannot look in deep.  
But when was that ever a bar  
To any watch they keep?

## VOICE WAYS

Some things are never clear.  
But the weather is clear tonight,  
Thanks to a clearing rain.  
The mountains are brought up near,  
The stars are brought out bright.  
Your old sweet-cynical strain  
Would come in like you here:  
'So we won't say nothing is clear.'

## DESIGN

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,  
On a white heal-all, holding up a moth  
Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—  
Assorted characters of death and blight.  
Mixed ready to begin the morning right,  
Like the ingredients of a witches' broth—  
A snow-drop spider, a flower like froth,  
And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,  
The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?  
What brought the kindred spider to that height,  
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?  
What but design of darkness to appall?—  
If design govern in a thing so small.

## ON A BIRD SINGING IN ITS SLEEP

A bird half wakened in the lunar noon  
Sang half way through its little inborn tune.  
Partly because it sang but once all night  
And that from no especial bush's height;  
Partly because it sang ventriloquist  
And had the inspiration to desist  
Almost before the prick of hostile ears,  
It ventured less in peril than appears.  
It could not have come down to us so far  
Through the interstices of things ajar  
On the long bead chain of repeated birth  
To be a bird while we are men on earth  
If singing out of sleep and dream that way  
Had made it much more easily a prey.

## UNHARVESTED

A scent of ripeness from over a wall.  
And come to leave the routine road  
And look for what had made me stall,  
There sure enough was an appletree  
That had eased itself of its summer load,  
And of all but its trivial foliage free,  
Now breathed as light as a lady's fan.  
For there there had been an apple fall  
As complete as the apple had given man.  
The ground was one circle of solid red.

May something go always unharvested!  
May much stay out of our stated plan,  
Apples or something forgotten and left,  
So smelling their sweetness would be no theft.

## THERE ARE ROUGHLY ZONES

We sit indoors and talk of the cold outside.  
And every gust that gathers strength and heaves  
Is a threat to the house. But the house has long been  
tried.

We think of the tree. If it never again has leaves,  
We'll know, we say, that this was the night it died.  
It is very far north, we admit, to have brought the  
peach.

What comes over a man, is it soul or mind—  
That to no limits and bounds he can stay confined?  
You would say his ambition was to extend the reach  
Clear to the Arctic of every living kind.  
Why is his nature forever so hard to teach  
That though there is no fixed line between wrong  
and right,

There are roughly zones whose laws must be obeyed.  
There is nothing much we can do for the tree tonight,  
But we can't help feeling more than a little betrayed  
That the northwest wind should rise to such a height  
Just when the cold went down so many below.  
The tree has no leaves and may never have them again.  
We must wait till some months hence in the spring  
to know.

But if it is destined never again to grow,  
It can blame this limitless trait in the hearts of men.

## A TRIAL RUN

I said to myself almost in prayer,  
It will start hair raising currents of air  
When you give it the livid metal-sap.  
It will make a homicidal roar.  
It will shake its cast stone reef of floor.  
It will gather speed till your nerves prepare  
To hear it wreck in a thunder-clap.  
But stand your ground  
As they say in war.  
It is cotter-pinned, it is bedded true.  
Everything its parts can do  
Has been thought out and accounted for.  
Your least touch sets it going round,  
And when to stop it rests with you.



## NOT QUITE SOCIAL

Some of you will be glad I did what I did,  
And the rest won't want to punish me too severely  
For finding a thing to do that though not forbid  
Yet wasn't enjoined and wasn't expected clearly.

To punish me over cruelly wouldn't be right  
For merely giving you once more gentle proof  
That the city's hold on a man is no more tight  
Than when its walls rose higher than any roof.

You may taunt me with not being able to flee the  
earth.  
You have me there, but loosely as I would be held.  
The way of understanding is partly mirth.  
I would not be taken as ever having rebelled.

And anyone is free to condemn me to death—  
If he leaves it to nature to carry out the sentence.  
I shall will to the common stock of air my breath  
And pay a death-tax of fairly polite repentance.

## PROVIDE PROVIDE

The witch that came (the withered hag)  
To wash the steps with pail and rag,  
Was once the beauty Abishag,

The picture pride of Hollywood.  
Too many fall from great and good  
For you to doubt the likelihood.

Die early and avoid the fate.  
Or if predestined to die late,  
Make up your mind to die in state.

Make the whole stock exchange your own!  
If need be occupy a throne,  
Where nobody can call *you* crone.

Some have relied on what they knew;  
Others on being simply true.  
What worked for them might work for you.

No memory of having starred  
Atones for later disregard,  
Or keeps the end from being hard.

Better to go down dignified  
With boughten friendship at your side  
Than none at all. Provide, provide!

## TEN MILLS

### PRECAUTION

I never dared be radical when young  
For fear it would make me conservative when old.

### THE SPAN OF LIFE

The old dog barks backward without getting up.  
I can remember when he was a pup.

### THE WRIGHTS' BIPLANE

This biplane is the shape of human flight.  
Its name might better be First Motor Kite.  
Its makers' name—Time cannot get that wrong,  
For it was writ in heaven doubly Wright.

### ASSERTIVE

Let me be the one  
To do what is done.

### EVIL TENDENCIES CANCEL

Will the blight end the chestnut?  
The farmers rather guess not.  
It keeps smouldering at the roots  
And sending up new shoots  
Till another parasite  
Shall come to end the blight.

### PERTINAX

Let chaos storm!  
Let cloud shapes swarm!  
I wait for form.

### WASPISH

On glossy wires artistically bent,  
He draws himself up to his full extent.  
His natty wings with self-assurance perk.  
His stinging quarters menacingly work.  
Poor egotist, he has no way of knowing  
But he's as good as anybody going.

### ONE GUESS

He has dust in his eyes and a fan for a wing,  
A leg akimbo with which he can sing,  
And a mouthful of dye stuff instead of a sting.

### THE HARDSHIP OF ACCOUNTING

Never ask of money spent  
Where the spender thinks it went.  
Nobody was ever meant  
To remember or invent  
What he did with every cent.

### NOT ALL THERE

I turned to speak to God  
About the world's despair;  
But to make bad matters worse

I found God wasn't there.  
God turned to speak to me  
(Don't anybody laugh)  
God found I wasn't there—  
At least not over half.

#### IN DIVES' DIVE

It is late at night and still I am losing,  
But still I am steady and unaccusing.

As long as the Declaration guards  
My right to be equal in number of cards,

It is nothing to me who runs the Dive.  
Let's have a look at another five.

## THE VINDICTIVES

You like to hear about gold.  
A king filled his prison room  
As full as the room could hold  
To the top of his reach on the wall  
With every known shape of the stuff.  
'Twas to buy himself off his doom.  
But it wasn't ransom enough.  
His captors accepted it all,  
But didn't let go of the king.  
They made him send out a call  
To his subjects to gather them more.  
And his subjects wrung all they could wring  
Out of temple and palace and store.  
But when there seemed no more to bring,  
His captors convicted the king  
Of once having started a war,  
And strangled the wretch with a string.

But really that gold was not half  
That a king might have hoped to compel—  
Not a half, not a third, not a tithe.  
The king had scarce ceased to writhe,  
When hate gave a terrible laugh,  
Like a manhole opened to Hell.  
If gold pleased the conqueror, well,  
That gold should be the one thing  
The conqueror henceforth should lack.

They gave no more thought to the king.  
All joined in the game of hide-gold.  
They swore all the gold should go back  
Deep into the earth whence it came.

Their minds ran on cranny and crack.  
All joined in the maddening game.  
The tale is still boastingly told  
Of many a treasure by name  
That vanished into the black  
And put out its light for the foe.

That self-sack and self-overthrow,  
That was the splendoriest sack  
Since the forest Germans sacked Rome  
And took the gold candlesticks home.

One Inca prince on the rack,  
And late in his last hour alive,  
Told them in what lake to dive  
To seek what they seemed so to want.  
They dived and nothing was found.  
He told them to dive till they drowned.  
The whole fierce conquering pack  
Hunted and tortured and raged.  
There were suns of story and vaunt  
They searched for into Brazil  
Their tongues hanging out unassuaged.

But the conquered grew meek and still.  
They slowly and silently aged.  
They kept their secrets and died,  
Maliciously satisfied.  
One knew of a burial hole  
In the floor of a tribal cave,  
Where under deep ash and charcoal  
And cracked bones, human and beast,  
The midden of feast upon feast,

Was coiled in its last resting grave  
The great treasure wanted the most,  
The great thousand-linked gold chain,  
Each link of a hundred weight,  
That once between post and post  
(In-leaning under the strain),  
And looped ten times back and forth,  
Had served as a palace gate.  
Some said it had gone to the coast,  
Some over the mountains east,  
Some into the country north,  
On the backs of a single-file host,  
Commanded by one sun-priest,  
And raising a dust with a train  
Of flashing links in the sun.  
No matter what some may say.  
(The saying is never done.)  
There bright in the filth it lay  
Untarnished by rust and decay.  
And be all plunderers curst.



'The best way to hate is the worst.  
'Tis to find what the hated need,  
Never mind of what actual worth,  
And wipe that out of the earth.  
Let them die of unsatisfied greed,  
Of unsatisfied love of display,  
Of unsatisfied love of the high,  
Unvulgar, unsoiled, and ideal.  
Let their trappings be taken away.  
Let them suffer starvation and die  
Of being brought down to the real.'

## THE BEARER OF EVIL TIDINGS

The bearer of evil tidings,  
When he was halfway there,  
Remembered that evil tidings  
Were a dangerous thing to bear.

So when he came to the parting  
Where one road led to the throne  
And one went off to the mountains  
And into the wild unknown,

He took the one to the mountains.  
He ran through the Vale of Cashmere,  
He ran through the rhododendrons  
Till he came to the land of Pamir.

And there in a precipice valley  
A girl of his age he met  
Took him home to her bower,  
Or he might be running yet.

She taught him her tribe's religion:  
How ages and ages since  
A princess en route from China  
To marry a Persian prince

Had been found with child; and her army  
Had come to a troubled halt.

And though a god was the father  
And nobody else at fault,

It had seemed discreet to remain there  
And neither go on nor back.  
So they stayed and declared a village  
There in the land of the Yak.

And the child that came of the princess  
Established a royal line,  
And his mandates were given heed to  
Because he was born divine.

And that was why there were people  
On one Himalayan shelf;  
And the bearer of evil tidings  
Decided to stay there himself.

At least he had this in common  
With the race he chose to adopt:  
They had both of them had their reasons  
For stopping where they had stopped.

As for his evil tidings,  
Belshazzar's overthrow,  
Why hurry to tell Belshazzar  
What soon enough he would know?

## IRIS BY NIGHT

One misty evening, one another's guide,  
We two were groping down a Malvern side  
The last wet fields and dripping hedges home.  
There came a moment of confusing lights,  
Such as according to belief in Rome  
Were seen of old at Memphis on the heights  
Before the fragments of a former sun  
Could concentrate anew and rise as one.  
Light was a paste of pigment in our eyes.  
And then there was a moon and then a scene  
So watery as to seem submarine;  
In which we two stood saturated, drowned.  
The clover-mingled rowan on the ground  
Had taken all the water it could as dew,  
And still the air was saturated too,  
Its airy pressure turned to water weight.  
Then a small rainbow like a trellis gate,  
A very small moon-made prismatic bow,  
Stood closely over us through which to go.  
And then we were vouchsafed the miracle  
That never yet to other two befell  
And I alone of us have lived to tell.  
A wonder! Bow and rainbow as it bent,  
Instead of moving with us as we went,  
(To keep the pots of gold from being found)  
It lifted from its dewy pediment  
Its two mote-swimming many-colored ends,

And gathered them together in a ring.  
And we stood in it softly circled round  
From all division time or foe can bring  
In a relation of elected friends.

## BUILD SOIL—A POLITICAL PASTORAL

Why Tityrus! But you've forgotten me.  
I'm Meliboeus the potato man,  
The one you had the talk with, you remember,  
Here on this very campus years ago.  
Hard times have struck me and I'm on the move.  
I've had to give my interval farm up  
For interest, and I've bought a mountain farm  
For nothing down, all-out-doors of a place,  
All woods and pasture only fit for sheep.  
But sheep is what I'm going into next.  
I'm done forever with potato crops  
At thirty cents a bushel. Give me sheep.  
I know wool's down to seven cents a pound.  
But I don't calculate to sell my wool.  
I didn't my potatoes. I consumed them.  
I'll dress up in sheep's clothing and eat sheep.  
The Muse takes care of you. You live by writing  
Your poems on a farm and call that farming.  
Oh I don't blame you. I say take life easy.  
I should myself, only I don't know how.  
But have some pity on us who have to work.  
Why don't you use your talents as a writer  
To advertise our farms to city buyers,  
Or else write something to improve food prices.  
Get in a poem toward the next election.

Oh Meliboeus, I have half a mind  
To take a writing hand in politics.  
Before now poetry has taken notice  
Of wars, and what are wars but politics  
Transformed from chronic to acute and bloody?  
I may be wrong, but Tityrus to me  
The times seem revolutionary bad.

The question is whether they've reached a depth  
Of desperation that would warrant poetry's  
Leaving love's alternations, joy and grief,  
The weather's alternations, summer and winter,  
Our age-long theme, for the uncertainty  
Of judging who is a contemporary liar—  
Who in particular, when all alike  
Get called as much in clashes of ambition.  
Life may be tragically bad, and I  
Make bold to sing it so, but do I dare  
Name names and tell you who by name is wicked?  
Whittier's luck with Skipper Ireson awes me.  
Many men's luck with Greatest Washington  
(Who sat for Stuart's portrait, but who sat  
Equally for the nation's Constitution).  
I prefer to sing safely in the realm  
Of types, composite and imagined people:  
To affirm there is such a thing as evil  
Personified, but ask to be excused  
From saying on a jury 'Here's the guilty.

I doubt if you're convinced the times are bad.  
I keep my eye on Congress, Meliboeus.  
They're in the best position of us all  
To know if anything is very wrong.  
I mean they could be trusted to give the alarm  
If earth were thought about to change its axis,  
Or a star coming to dilate the sun.  
As long as lightly all their live-long sessions,  
Like a yard full of school boys out at recess  
Before their plays and games were organized,  
They yelling mix tag, hide-and-seek, hop-scotch,  
And leap frog in each other's way,—all's well.  
Let newspapers profess to fear the worst!  
Nothing's portentous, I am reassured.

Is socialism needed, do you think?

We have it now. For socialism is  
An element in any government.  
There's no such thing as socialism pure—  
Except as an abstraction of the mind.  
There's only democratic socialism  
Monarchic socialism—oligarchic,  
The last being what they seem to have in Russia.  
You often get it most in monarchy,  
Least in democracy. In practice, pure,  
I don't know what it would be. No one knows.  
I have no doubt like all the loves when  
Philosophized together into one—  
One sickness of the body and the soul.



Thank God our practice holds the loves apart  
Beyond embarrassing self-consciousness  
Where natural friends are met, where dogs are  
    kept,  
Where women pray with priests. There is no love.  
There's only love of men and women, love  
Of children, love of friends, of men, of God,  
Divine love, human love, parental love,  
Roughly discriminated for the rough.

Poetry, itself once more, is back in love.

Pardon the analogy, my Meliboeus,  
For sweeping me away. Let's see, where was I?  
But don't you think more should be socialized  
Than is?

What should you mean by socialized?

Made good for everyone—things like inventions—  
Made so we all should get the good of them—  
All, not just great exploiting businesses.

We sometimes only get the bad of them.  
In your sense of the word ambition has  
Been socialized—the first propensity  
To be attempted. Greed may well come next.  
But the worst one of all to leave uncurbed,  
Unsocialized, is ingenuity:  
Which for no sordid self-aggrandizement,  
For nothing but its own blind satisfaction

(In this it is as much like hate as love)  
Works in the dark as much against as for us.  
Even while we talk some chemist at Columbia  
Is stealthily contriving wool from jute  
That when let loose upon the grazing world  
Will put ten thousand farmers out of sheep.  
Everyone asks for freedom for himself,  
The man free love, the business man free trade,  
The writer and talker free speech and free press.  
Political ambition has been taught,  
By being punished back, it is not free:  
It must at some point gracefully refrain.  
Greed has been taught a little abnegation  
And shall be more before we're done with it.  
It is just fool enough to think itself  
Self-taught. But our brute snarling and lashing  
taught it.  
None shall be as ambitious as he can.  
None should be as ingenious as he could,  
Not if I had my say. Bounds should be set  
To ingenuity for being so cruel  
In bringing change unheralded on the unready.

I elect you to put the curb on it.

Were I dictator, I'll tell you what I'd do.

What should you do?

I'd let things take their course  
And then I'd claim the credit for the outcome.

You'd make a sort of safety-first dictator.

Don't let the things I say against myself  
Betray you into taking sides against me,  
Or it might get you into trouble with me.  
I'm not afraid to prophesy the future,  
And be judged by the outcome, Meliboeus.  
Listen and I will take my dearest risk.  
We're always too much out or too much in.  
At present from a cosmical dilation  
We're so much out that the odds are against  
Our ever getting inside in again.  
But inside in is where we've got to get.  
My friends all know I'm interpersonal.  
But long before I'm interpersonal  
Away 'way down inside I'm personal.  
Just so before we're international  
We're national and act as nationals.  
The colors are kept unmixed on the palette,  
Or better on dish plates all around the room,

So the effect when they are mixed on canvas  
May seem almost exclusively designed.  
Some minds are so confounded intermental  
They remind me of pictures on a palette:  
'Look at what happened. Surely some God pinxit.  
Come look at my significant mud pie.'  
It's hard to tell which is the worse abhorrence  
Whether it's persons pied or nations pied.  
Don't let me seem to say the exchange, the encounter,

May not be the important thing at last.  
It well may be. We meet—I don't say when—  
But must bring to the meeting the maturest,  
The longest-saved-up, raciest, localest  
We have strength of reserve in us to bring.

Tityrus, sometimes I'm perplexed myself  
To find the good of commerce. Why should I  
Have to sell you my apples and buy yours?  
It can't be just to give the robber a chance  
To catch them and take toll of them in transit.  
Too mean a thought to get much comfort out of.  
I figure that like any bandying  
Of words or toys, it ministers to health.  
It very likely quickens and refines us.

To market 'tis our destiny to go.  
But much as in the end we bring for sale there  
There is still more we never bring or should bring;  
More that should be kept back—the soil for  
instance  
In my opinion,—though we both know poets  
Who fall all over each other to bring soil  
And even subsoil and hardpan to market.  
To sell the hay off, let alone the soil,  
Is an unpardonable sin in farming.  
The moral is, make a late start to market.  
Let me preach to you, will you Meliboeus?  
Preach on. I thought you were already preaching.  
But preach and see if I can tell the difference.

Needless to say to you, my argument  
Is not to lure the city to the country.  
Let those possess the land and only those,  
Who love it with a love so strong and stupid  
That they may be abused and taken advantage of  
And made fun of by business, law and art;  
They still hang on. That so much of the earth's  
Unoccupied need not make us uneasy.  
We don't pretend to complete occupancy.  
The world's one globe, human society  
Another softer globe that slightly flattened  
Rests on the world, and clinging slowly rolls.  
We have our own round shape to keep unbroken.  
The world's size has no more to do with us  
Than has the universe's. We are balls,  
We are round from the same source of roundness.  
We are both round because the mind is round,  
Because all reasoning is in a circle.  
At least that's why the universe is round.

If what you're preaching is a line of conduct,  
Just what am I supposed to do about it?  
Reason in circles?

No, refuse to be  
Seduced back to the land by any claim  
The land may seem to have on man to use it.  
Let none assume to till the land but farmers.  
I only speak to you as one of them.  
You shall go to your run-out mountain farm,

Poor cast-away of commerce, and so live  
That none shall ever see you come to market—  
Not for a long long time. Plant, breed, produce,  
But what you raise or grow, why feed it out,  
Eat it or plow it under where it stands  
To build the soil. For what is more accursed  
Than an impoverished soil pale and metallic?  
What cries more to our kind for sympathy?  
I'll make a compact with you, Meliboeus,  
To match you deed for deed and plan for plan.  
Friends crowd around me with their five year plans  
That Soviet Russia has made fashionable.  
You come to me and I'll unfold to you  
A five year plan I call so, not because  
It takes ten years or so to carry out,  
Rather because it took five years at least  
To think it out. Come close, let us conspire—  
In self-restraint, if in restraint of trade.  
You will go to your run-out mountain farm  
And do what I command you, I take care  
To command only what you meant to do  
Anyway. That is my style of dictator.  
Build soil. Turn the farm in upon itself  
Until it can contain itself no more,  
But sweating-full, drips wine and oil a little.  
I will go to my run-out social mind  
And be as unsocial with it as I can.  
The thought I have, and my first impulse is  
To take to market—I will turn it under.  
The thought from that thought—I will turn it under

And so on to the limit of my nature.  
We are too much out, and if we won't draw in  
We shall be driven in. I was brought up  
A state-rights free-trade Democrat. What's that ?  
An inconsistency. The state shall be  
Laws to itself, it seems, and yet have no  
Control of what it sells or what it buys.  
Suppose someone comes near me who in rate  
Of speech and thinking is so much my better  
I am imposed on, silenced and discouraged.  
Do I submit to being supplied by him  
As the more economical producer,  
More wonderful, more beautiful producer?  
No. I unostentatiously move off  
Far enough for my thought-flow to resume.  
Thought product and food product are to me  
Nothing compared to the producing of them  
I sent you once a song with the refrain:

Let me be the one  
To do what is done—

My share at least lest I be empty-idle.  
Keep off each other and keep each other off.  
You see the beauty of my proposal is  
It needn't wait on general revolution.  
I bid you to a one-man revolution —  
The only revolution that is coming.  
We're too unseparate out among each other—  
With goods to sell and notions to impart.

A youngster comes to me with half a quatrain  
To ask me if I think it worth the pains |  
Of working out the rest, the other half.  
I am brought guaranteed young prattle poems  
Made publicly in school, above suspicion  
Of plagiarism and help of cheating parents.  
We congregate embracing from distrust  
As much as love, and too close in to strike  
And be so very striking. Steal away  
The song says. Steal away and stay away.  
Don't join too many gangs. Join few if any.  
Join the United States and join the family—  
But not much in between unless a college.  
Is it a bargain, Shepherd Meliboeus?

Probably but you're far too fast and strong  
For my mind to keep working in your presence.  
I can tell better after I get home,  
Better a month from now when cutting posts  
Or mending fence it all comes back to me  
What I was thinking when you interrupted  
My life-train logic. I agree with you  
We're too unseparate. And going home  
From company means coming to our senses.



## A MISSIVE MISSILE

Some one in ancient Mas d'Azil  
Once took a little pebble wheel  
And dotted it with red for me,  
And sent it to me years and years—  
A million years to be precise—  
Across the barrier of ice:  
Two round dots and a ripple streak,  
So vivid as to seem to speak.  
But what imperfectly appears  
Is whether the two dots were tears,  
Two tear drops, one for either eye,  
And the wave line a shaken sigh.  
But no, the color used is red.  
Not tears but drops of blood instead.  
The line must be a jagged blade.  
The sender must have had to die,  
And wanted some one now to know  
His death was sacrificial-votive.  
So almost clear and yet obscure.  
If only anyone were sure  
A motive then was still a motive.  
O you who bring this to my hand,  
You are no common messenger  
(Your badge of office is a spade).  
It grieves me to have had you stand  
So long for nothing. No reply—  
There is no answer, I'm afraid,

Across the icy barrier  
For my obscure petitioner.  
Suppose his ghost is standing by  
Importunate to give the hint  
And be successfully conveyed.  
How anyone can fail to see  
Where perfectly in form and tint  
The metaphor, the symbol lies!  
Why will I not analogize?  
(I do too much in some men's eyes.)  
Oh slow uncomprehending me,  
Enough to make a spirit moan  
Or rustle in a bush or tree.  
I have the ochre-written flint,  
The two dots and the ripple line.  
The meaning of it is unknown,  
Or else I fear entirely mine,  
All modern, nothing ancient in't,  
Unsatisfying to us each.  
Far as we aim our signs to reach,  
Far as we often make them reach,  
Across the soul-from-soul abyss,  
There is an aeon-limit set  
Beyond which they are doomed to miss.  
Two souls may be too widely met.  
That sad-with-distance river beach  
With mortal longing may beseech;  
It cannot speak as far as this.



*A Witness Tree*



## BEECH

*Where my imaginary line  
Bends square in woods, an iron spine  
And pile of real rocks have been founded.  
And off this corner in the wild,  
Where these are driven in and piled,  
One tree, by being deeply wounded,  
Has been impressed as Witness Tree  
And made commit to memory  
My proof of being not unbounded.  
Thus truth's established and borne out,  
Though circumstanced with dark and doubt—  
Though by a world of doubt surrounded.*

THE MOODIE FORESTER

## SYCAMORE

*Zaccheus he  
Did climb the tree  
Our Lord to see.*

THE NEW ENGLAND PRIMER



## THE SILKEN TENT

She is as in a field a silken tent  
At midday when a sunny summer breeze  
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,  
So that in guys it gently sways at ease,  
And its supporting central cedar pole,  
That is its pinnacle to heavenward  
And signifies the sureness of the soul,  
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,  
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound  
By countless silken ties of love and thought  
To everything on earth the compass round,  
And only by one's going slightly taut  
In the capriciousness of summer air  
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.



## ALL REVELATION

A head thrusts in as for the view,  
But where it is it thrusts in from  
Or what it is it thrusts into  
By that Cyb'laean avenue,  
And what can of its coming come,

And whither it will be withdrawn,  
And what take hence or leave behind,  
These things the mind has pondered on  
A moment and still asking gone.  
Strange apparition of the mind!

But the impervious geode  
Was entered, and its inner crust  
Of crystals with a ray cathode  
At every point and facet glowed  
In answer to the mental thrust.

Eyes seeking the response of eyes  
Bring out the stars, bring out the flowers,  
Thus concentrating earth and skies  
So none need be afraid of size.  
All revelation has been ours.

HAPPINESS MAKES UP IN HEIGHT  
FOR WHAT IT LACKS IN LENGTH

Oh, stormy stormy world,  
The days you were not swirled  
Around with mist and cloud,  
Or wrapped as in a shroud,  
And the sun's brilliant ball  
Was not in part or all  
Obscured from mortal view—  
Were days so very few  
I can but wonder whence  
I get the lasting sense  
Of so much warmth and light.  
If my mistrust is right  
It may be altogether  
From one day's perfect weather,  
When starting clear at dawn,  
The day swept clearly on  
To finish clear at eve.  
I verily believe  
My fair impression may  
Be all from that one day  
No shadow crossed but ours  
As through its blazing flowers  
We went from house to wood  
For change of solitude.

## COME IN

As I came to the edge of the woods,  
Thrush music—hark!  
Now if it was dusk outside,  
Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird  
By sleight of wing  
To better its perch for the night,  
Though it still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun  
That had died in the west  
Still lived for one song more  
In a thrush's breast.

Far in the pillared dark  
Thrush music went—  
Almost like a call to come in  
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars:  
I would not come in.  
I meant not even if asked,  
And I hadn't been.

## I COULD GIVE ALL TO TIME

To Time it never seems that he is brave  
To set himself against the peaks of snow  
To lay them level with the running wave,  
Nor is he overjoyed when they lie low,  
But only grave, contemplative and grave.

What now is inland shall be ocean isle,  
Then eddies playing round a sunken reef  
Like the curl at the corner of a smile;  
And I could share Time's lack of joy or grief  
At such a planetary change of style.

I could give all to Time except—except  
What I myself have held. But why declare  
The things forbidden that while the Customs slept  
I have crossed to Safety with? For I am There,  
And what I would not part with I have kept.

## CARPE DIEM

Age saw two quiet children  
Go loving by at twilight,  
He knew not whether homeward,  
Or outward from the village,  
Or (chimes were ringing) churchward.  
He waited (they were strangers)  
Till they were out of hearing  
To bid them both be happy.  
"Be happy, happy, happy,  
And seize the day of pleasure."  
The age-long theme is Age's.  
'Twas Age imposed on poems  
Their gather-roses burden  
To warn against the danger  
That overtaken lovers  
From being overflowed  
With happiness should have it  
And yet not know they have it.  
But bid life seize the present?  
It lives less in the present  
Than in the future always,  
And less in both together  
Than in the past. The present  
Is too much for the senses,  
Too crowding, too confusing—  
Too present to imagine.

## THE WIND AND THE RAIN

### I

That far-off day the leaves in flight  
Were letting in the colder light.  
A season-ending wind there blew  
That as it did the forest strew  
I leaned on with a singing trust  
And let it drive me deathward too.  
With breaking step I stabbed the dust,  
Yet did not much to shorten stride.  
I sang of death—but had I known  
The many deaths one must have died  
Before he came to meet his own!  
Oh, should a child be left unwarned  
That any song in which he mourned  
Would be as if he prophesied?  
It were unworthy of the tongue  
To let the half of life alone  
And play the good without the ill.  
And yet 'twould seem that what is sung  
In happy sadness by the young  
Fate has no choice but to fulfill.

### II

Flowers in the desert heat  
Contrive to bloom  
On melted mountain water led by flume  
To wet their feet.

But something in it still is incomplete.  
Before I thought the wilted to exalt  
With water I would see them water-bowed.  
I would pick up all ocean less its salt,  
And though it were as much as cloud could bear  
Would load it on to cloud,  
And rolling it inland on roller air,  
Would empty it unsparing on the flower  
That past its prime lost petals in the flood,  
(Who cares but for the future of the bud?)  
And all the more the mightier the shower  
Would run in under it to get my share.

'Tis not enough on roots and in the mouth,  
But give me water heavy on the head  
In all the passion of a broken drouth.

And there is always more than should be said.

As strong is rain without as wine within,  
As magical as sunlight on the skin.

I have been one no dwelling could contain  
When there was rain;

But I must forth at dusk, my time of day,  
To see to the unburdening of skies.  
Rain was the tears adopted by my eyes  
That have none left to stay.

## THE MOST OF IT

He thought he kept the universe alone;  
For all the voice in answer he could wake  
Was but the mocking echo of his own  
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake.  
Some morning from the boulder-broken beach  
He would cry out on life, that what it wants  
Is not its own love back in copy speech,  
But counter-love, original response.  
And nothing ever came of what he cried  
Unless it was the embodiment that crashed  
In the cliff's talus on the other side,  
And then in the far distant water splashed,  
But after a time allowed for it to swim,  
Instead of proving human when it neared  
And someone else additional to him,  
As a great buck it powerfully appeared,  
Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,  
And landed pouring like a waterfall,  
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,  
And forced the underbrush—and that was all.



NEVER AGAIN WOULD  
BIRDS' SONG BE THE SAME

He would declare and could himself believe  
That the birds there in all the garden round  
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve  
Had added to their own an oversound,  
Her tone of meaning but without the words.  
Admittedly an eloquence so soft  
Could only have had an influence on birds  
When call or laughter carried it aloft.  
Be that as may be, she was in their song  
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed  
Had now persisted in the woods so long  
That probably it never would be lost.  
Never again would birds' song be the same.  
And to do that to birds was why she came.

## WILFUL HOMING

It is getting dark and time he drew to a house,  
But the blizzard blinds him to any house ahead.  
The storm gets down his neck in an icy souse  
That sucks his breath like a wicked cat in bed.

The snow blows on him and off him, exerting force  
Downward to make him sit astride a drift,  
Imprint a saddle and calmly consider a course.  
He peers out shrewdly into the thick and swift.

Since he means to come to a door he will come to a  
door,  
Although so compromised of aim and rate  
He may fumble wide of the knob a yard or more,  
And to those concerned he may seem a little late.

## A CLOUD SHADOW

A breeze discovered my open book  
And began to flutter the leaves to look  
For a poem there used to be on Spring.  
I tried to tell her "There's no such thing!"

For whom would a poem on Spring be by?  
The breeze disdained to make reply;  
And a cloud-shadow crossed her face  
For fear I would make her miss the place.

## THE QUEST OF THE PURPLE-FRINGED

I felt the chill of the meadow underfoot,  
But the sun overhead;  
And snatches of verse and song of scenes like this  
I sung or said.

I skirted the margin alders for miles and miles  
In a sweeping line.  
The day was the day by every flower that blooms,  
But I saw no sign.

Yet further I went to be before the scythe,  
For the grass was high;  
Till I saw the path where the slender fox had come  
And gone panting by.

Then at last and following him I found—  
In the very hour  
When the color flushed to the petals it must have  
    been—  
The far-sought flower.

There stood the purple spires with no breath of air  
Nor headlong bee  
To disturb their perfect poise the livelong day  
'Neath the alder tree.

I only knelt and putting the boughs aside  
Looked, or at most  
Counted them all to the buds in the copse's depth  
That were pale as a ghost.

Then I arose and silently wandered home,  
And I for one  
Said that the fall might come and whirl of leaves,  
For summer was done.

## THE GIFT OUTRIGHT

The land was ours before we were the land's.  
She was our land more than a hundred years  
Before we were her people. She was ours  
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,  
But we were England's, still colonials,  
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,  
Possessed by what we now no more possessed.  
Something we were withholding made us weak  
Until we found it was ourselves  
We were withholding from our land of living,  
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.  
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright  
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)  
To the land vaguely realizing westward,  
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,  
Such as she was, such as she would become.

## TRIPLE BRONZE

The Infinite's being so wide  
Is the reason the Powers provide  
For inner defense my hide.  
For next defense outside

I make myself this time  
Of wood or granite or lime  
A wall too hard for crime  
Either to breach or climb.

Then a number of us agree  
On a national boundary.  
And that defense makes three  
Between too much and me.

## OUR HOLD ON THE PLANET

We asked for rain. It didn't flash and roar.  
It didn't lose its temper at our demand  
And blow a gale. It didn't misunderstand  
And give us more than our spokesman bargained  
for;  
And just because we owned to a wish for rain,  
Send us a flood and bid us be damned and drown.  
It gently threw us a glittering shower down.  
And when we had taken that into the roots of grain,  
It threw us another and then another still  
Till the spongy soil again was natal wet.  
We may doubt the just proportion of good to ill.  
There is much in nature against us. But we forget:  
Take nature altogether since time began,  
Including human nature, in peace and war,  
And it must be a little more in favor of man,  
Say a fraction of one per cent at the very least,  
Or our number living wouldn't be steadily more,  
Our hold on the planet wouldn't have so increased.



## TO A YOUNG WRETCH

(BOETHIAN)

As gay for you to take your father's axe  
As take his gun—rod—to go hunting—fishing.  
You nick my spruce until its fiber cracks,  
It gives up standing straight and goes down swishing.  
You link an arm in its arm and you lean  
Across the light snow homeward smelling green.

I could have bought you just as good a tree  
To frizzle resin in a candle flame,  
And what a saving 'twould have meant to me.  
But tree by charity is not the same  
As tree by enterprise and expedition.  
I must not spoil your Christmas with contrition.

It is your Christmases against my woods.  
But even where thus opposing interests kill,  
They are to be thought of as opposing goods  
Often than as conflicting good and ill;  
Which makes the war god seem no special dunce  
For always fighting on both sides at once.

And though in tinsel chain and popcorn rope,  
My tree a captive in your window bay  
Has lost its footing on my mountain slope  
And lost the stars of heaven, may, oh, may  
The symbol star it lifts against your ceiling  
Help me accept its fate with Christmas feeling.

## THE LESSON FOR TODAY

If this uncertain age in which we dwell  
Were really as dark as I hear sages tell,  
And I convinced that they were really sages,  
I should not curse myself with it to hell,  
But leaving not the chair I long have sat in,  
I should betake me back ten thousand pages  
To the world's undebatably dark ages,  
And getting up my mediaeval Latin,  
Seek converse common cause and brotherhood  
(By all that's liberal—I should, I should)  
With poets who could calmly take the fate  
Of being born at once too early and late,  
And for these reasons kept from being great.  
Yet singing but Dione in the wood  
And *ver aspergit terram floribus*  
They slowly led old Latin verse to rhyme  
And to forget the ancient lengths of time,  
And so began the modern world for us.

I'd say, O Master of the Palace School,  
You were not Charles' nor anybody's fool:  
Tell me as pedagogué to pedagogue,  
You did not know that since King Charles did rule  
You had no chance but to be minor, did you?  
Your light was spent perhaps as in a fog  
That at once kept you burning low and hid you.  
The age may very well have been to blame  
For your not having won to Virgil's fame.

But no one ever heard you make the claim.  
You would not think you knew enough to judge  
The age when full upon you. That's my point.  
We have to-day and I could call their name  
Who know exactly what is out of joint  
To make their verse and their excuses lame.  
They've tried to grasp with too much social fact  
Too large a situation. You and I  
Would be afraid if we should comprehend  
And get outside of too much bad statistics  
Our muscles never could again contract:  
We never could recover human shape,  
But must live lives out mentally agape,  
Or die of philosophical distension.  
That's how we feel—and we're no special mystics.

We can't appraise the time in which we act.  
But for the folly of it, let's pretend  
We know enough to know it for adverse.  
One more millennium's about to end.  
Let's celebrate the event, my distant friend,  
In publicly disputing which is worse,  
The present age or your age. You and I  
As schoolmen of repute should qualify  
To wage a fine scholastical contention  
As to whose age deserves the lower mark,  
Or should I say the higher one, for dark.  
I can just hear the way you make it go:  
There's always something to be sorry for,  
A sordid peace or an outrageous war.

Yes, yes, of course. We have the same convention.  
The groundwork of all faith is human woe.  
It was well worth preliminary mention.  
There's nothing but injustice to be had,  
No choice is left a poet, you might add,  
But how to take the curse, tragic or comic.  
It was well worth preliminary mention.  
But let's get on to where our cases part,  
If part they do. Let me propose a start.  
(We're rivals in the badness of our case,  
Remember, and must keep a solemn face.)  
Space ails us moderns: we are sick with space.  
Its contemplation makes us out as small  
As a brief epidemic of microbes  
That in a good glass may be seen to crawl  
The patina of this the least of globes.  
But have we there the advantage after all?  
You were belittled into vilest worms  
God hardly tolerated with his feet;  
Which comes to the same thing in different terms,  
We both are the belittled human race,  
One as compared with God and one with space.  
I had thought ours the more profound disgrace;  
But doubtless this was only my conceit.  
The cloister and the observatory saint  
Take comfort in about the same complaint.  
So science and religion really meet.

I can just hear you call your Palace class:  
Come learn the Latin Eheu for alas.

You may not want to use it and you may.  
O paladins, the lesson for to-day  
Is how to be unhappy yet polite.  
And at the summons Roland, Olivier,  
And every sheepish paladin and peer,  
Being already more than proved in fight,  
Sits down in school to try if he can write  
Like Horace in the true Horatian vein,  
Yet like a Christian disciplined to bend  
His mind to thinking always of the end.  
Memento mori and obey the Lord.  
Art and religion love the somber chord.  
Earth's a hard place in which to save the soul,  
And could it be brought under state control,  
So automatically we all were saved,  
Its separateness from Heaven could be waived;  
It might as well at once be kingdom-come.  
(Perhaps it will be next millennium.)

But these are universals, not confined  
To any one time, place, or human kind.  
We're either nothing or a God's regret.  
As ever when philosophers are met,  
No matter where they stoutly mean to get,  
Nor what particulars they reason from,  
They are philosophers, and from old habit  
They end up in the universal Whole  
As unoriginal as any rabbit.

One age is like another for the soul.  
I'm telling you. You haven't said a thing,  
Unless I put it in your mouth to say.  
I'm having the whole argument my way—  
But in your favor—please to tell your King—  
In having granted you all ages shine  
With equal darkness, yours as dark as mine.  
I'm liberal. You, you aristocrat  
Won't know exactly what I mean by that.  
I mean so altruistically moral  
I never take my own side in a quarrel.  
I'd lay my hand on his hand on his staff,  
Lean back and have my confidential laugh,  
And tell him I had read his Epitaph.

It sent me to the graves the other day.  
The only other there was far away  
Across the landscape with a watering pot  
At his devotions in a special plot.  
And he was there resuscitating flowers  
(Make no mistake about its being bones);  
But I was only there to read the stones  
To see what on the whole they had to say  
About how long a man may think to live,  
Which is becoming my concern of late.  
And very wide the choice they seemed to give;  
The ages ranging all the way from hours  
To months and years and many many years.  
One man had lived one hundred years and eight.  
But though we all may be inclined to wait

And follow some development of state,  
Or see what comes of science and invention,  
There is a limit to our time extension.  
We all are doomed to broken-off careers,  
And so's the nation, so's the total race.  
The earth itself is liable to the fate  
Of meaninglessly being broken off.  
(And hence so many literary tears  
At which my inclination is to scoff.)  
I may have wept that any should have died  
Or missed their chance, or not have been their best,  
Or been their riches, fame, or love denied;  
On me as much as any is the jest.  
I take my incompleteness with the rest.  
God bless himself can no one else be blessed.

I hold your doctrine of Memento Mori.  
And were an epitaph to be my story  
I'd have a short one ready for my own.  
I would have written of me on my stone:  
I had a lover's quarrel with the world.

## TIME OUT

It took that pause to make him realize  
The mountain he was climbing had the slant  
As of a book held up before his eyes  
(And was a text albeit done in plant).  
Dwarf cornel, gold-thread, and maianthemum,  
He following fingered as he read,  
The flowers fading on the seed to come;  
But the thing was the slope it gave his head:  
The same for reading as it was for thought,  
So different from the hard and level stare  
Of enemies defied and battles fought.  
It was the obstinately gentle air  
That may be clamored at by cause and sect  
But it will have its moment to reflect.



## TO A MOTH SEEN IN WINTER

Here's first a gloveless hand warm from my pocket,  
A perch and resting place 'twixt wood and wood,  
Bright-black-eyed silvery creature, brushed with  
brown,

The wings not folded in repose, but spread.  
(Who would you be, I wonder, by those marks  
If I had moths to friend as I have flowers?)  
And now pray tell what lured you with false hope  
To make the venture of eternity  
And seek the love of kind in winter time?  
But stay and hear me out. I surely think  
You make a labor of flight for one so airy,  
Spending yourself too much in self-support.  
Nor will you find love either nor love you.  
And what I pity in you is something human,  
The old incurable untimeliness,  
Only begetter of all ills that are.  
But go. You are right. My pity cannot help.  
Go till you wet your pinions and are quenched.  
You must be made more simply wise than I  
To know the hand I stretch impulsively  
Across the gulf of well nigh everything  
May reach to you, but cannot touch your fate.  
I cannot touch your life, much less can save,  
Who am tasked to save my own a little while.

CIRCA 1900

## A CONSIDERABLE SPECK

(MICROSCOPIC)

A speck that would have been beneath my sight  
On any but a paper sheet so white  
Set off across what I had written there.  
And I had idly poised my pen in air  
To stop it with a period of ink  
When something strange about it made me think,  
This was no dust speck by my breathing blown,  
But unmistakably a living mite  
With inclinations it could call its own.  
It paused as with suspicion of my pen,  
And then came racing wildly on again  
To where my manuscript was not yet dry;  
Then paused again and either drank or smelt—  
With loathing, for again it turned to fly.  
Plainly with an intelligence I dealt.  
It seemed too tiny to have room for feet,  
Yet must have had a set of them complete  
To express how much it didn't want to die.  
It ran with terror and with cunning crept.  
It faltered: I could see it hesitate;  
Then in the middle of the open sheet  
Cower down in desperation to accept  
Whatever I accorded it of fate.  
I have none of the tenderer-than-thou  
Collectivistic regimenting love  
With which the modern world is being swept.

But this poor microscopic item now!  
Since it was nothing I knew evil of  
I let it lie there till I hope it slept.

I have a mind myself and recognize  
Mind when I meet with it in any guise.  
No one can know how glad I am to find  
On any sheet the least display of mind.

## THE LOST FOLLOWER

As I have known them passionate and fine  
The gold for which they leave the golden line  
Of lyric is a golden light divine,  
Never the gold of darkness from a mine.

The spirit plays us strange religious pranks  
To whatsoever god we owe the thanks.  
No one has ever failed the poet ranks  
To link a chain of money-metal banks.

The loss to song, the danger of defection  
Is always in the opposite direction.  
Some turn in sheer, in Shelleyan dejection  
To try if one more popular election

Will give us by short cut the final stage  
That poetry with all its golden rage  
For beauty on the illuminated page  
Has failed to bring—I mean the Golden Age.

And if this may not be (and nothing's sure),  
At least to live ungolden with the poor,  
Enduring what the ungolden must endure.  
This has been poetry's great anti-lure.

The muse mourns one who went to his retreat  
Long since in some abysmal city street,

The bride who shared the crust he broke to eat  
As grave as he about the world's defeat.

With such it has proved dangerous as friend  
Even in a playful moment to contend  
That the millennium to which you bend  
In longing is not at a progress-end

By grace of state-manipulated pelf,  
Or politics of Ghibelline or Guelph,  
But right beside you book-like on a shelf,  
Or even better god-like in yourself.

He trusts my love too well to deign reply.  
But there is in the sadness of his eye,  
Something about a kingdom in the sky  
(As yet unbrought to earth) he means to try.

## NOVEMBER

We saw leaves go to glory,  
Then almost migratory  
Go part way down the lane,  
And then to end the story  
Get beaten down and pasted  
In one wild day of rain.  
We heard " 'Tis over" roaring.  
A year of leaves was wasted.  
Oh, we make a boast of storing,  
Of saving and of keeping,  
But only by ignoring  
The waste of moments sleeping,  
The waste of pleasure weeping,  
By denying and ignoring  
The waste of nations warring.

1938

## THE RABBIT HUNTER

Careless and still  
The hunter lurks  
With gun depressed,  
Facing alone  
The alder swamps  
Ghastly snow-white.  
And his hound works  
In the offing there  
Like one possessed,  
And yelps delight  
And sings and romps,  
Bringing him on  
The shadowy hare  
For him to rend  
And deal a death  
That he nor it  
(Nor I) have wit  
To comprehend.

## A LOOSE MOUNTAIN

(TELESCOPIC)

Did you stay up last night (the Magi did)  
To see the star shower known as Leonid  
That once a year by hand or apparatus  
Is so mysteriously pelted at us?  
It is but fiery puffs of dust and pebbles,  
No doubt directed at our heads as rebels  
In having taken artificial light  
Against the ancient sovereignty of night.  
A fusillade of blanks and empty flashes,  
It never reaches earth except as ashes  
Of which you feel no least touch on your face  
Nor find in dew the slightest cloudy trace.  
Nevertheless it constitutes a hint  
That the loose mountain lately seen to glint  
In sunlight near us in momentous swing  
Is something in a Balearic sling  
The heartless and enormous Outer Black  
Is still withholding in the Zodiac  
But from irresolution in his back  
About when best to have us in our orbit,  
So we won't simply take it and absorb it.



IT IS ALMOST THE YEAR  
TWO THOUSAND

To start the world of old  
We had one age of gold  
Not labored out of mines,  
And some say there are signs  
The second such has come,  
The true Millennium,  
The final golden glow  
To end it. And if so  
(And science ought to know)  
We well may raise our heads  
From weeding garden beds  
And annotating books  
To watch this end de luxe.

## ON OUR SYMPATHY WITH THE UNDER DOG

First under up and then again down under,  
We watch a circus of revolving dogs  
No senator dares in to kick asunder  
Lest both should bite him in the toga-togs.

## A QUESTION

A voice said, Look me in the stars  
And tell me truly, men of earth,  
If all the soul-and-body scars  
Were not too much to pay for birth.

## BOEOTIAN

I love to toy with the Platonic notion  
That wisdom need not be of Athens Attic,  
But well may be Laconic, even Boeotian.  
At least I will not have it systematic.

## THE SECRET SITS

We dance round in a ring and suppose,  
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

## A SEMI-REVOLUTION

I advocate a semi-revolution.  
The trouble with a total revolution  
(Ask any reputable Rosicrucian)  
Is that it brings the same class up on top.  
Executives of skillful execution  
Will therefore plan to go half-way and stop.  
Yes, revolutions are the only salves,  
But they're one thing that should be done by halves.

## ASSURANCE

The danger not an inch outside  
Behind the porthole's slab of glass  
And double ring of fitted brass  
I trust feels properly defied.

## AN ANSWER

But Islands of the Blessèd, bless you son,  
I never came upon a blessèd one.



## TRESPASS

No, I had set no prohibiting sign,  
And yes, my land was hardly fenced.  
Nevertheless the land was mine:  
I was being trespassed on and against.

Whoever the surly freedom took  
Of such an unaccountable stay  
Busying by my woods and brook  
Gave me strangely restless day.

He might be opening leaves of stone,  
The picture-book of the trilobite,  
For which the region round was known,  
And in which there was little property right.

'Twas not the value I stood to lose  
In specimen crab in specimen rock,  
But his ignoring what was whose  
That made me look again at the clock.

Then came his little acknowledgment:  
He asked for a drink at the kitchen door,  
An errand he may have had to invent,  
But it made my property mine once more.

## A NATURE NOTE

Four or five whippoorwills  
Have come down from their native ledge  
To the open country edge  
To give us a piece of their bills.

Two in June were a pair—  
You'd say sufficiently loud,  
But this was a family crowd,  
A full-fledged family affair.

All out of time pell-mell!  
I wasn't in on the joke  
Unless it was coming to folk  
To bid us a mock farewell.

I took note of when it occurred,  
The twenty-third of September,  
Their latest that I remember,  
September the twenty-third.

## OF THE STONES OF THE PLACE

I farm a pasture where the boulders lie  
As touching as a basket full of eggs,  
And though they're nothing anybody begs,  
I wonder if it wouldn't signify

For me to send you one out where you live  
In wind-soil to a depth of thirty feet,  
And every acre good enough to eat,  
As fine as flour put through a baker's sieve.

I'd ship a smooth one you could slap and chafe,  
And set up like a statue in your yard,  
An eolith palladium to guard  
The West and keep the old tradition safe.

Carve nothing on it. You can simply say  
In self-defense to quizzical inquiry:  
"The portrait of the soul of my gransir Ira.  
It came from where he came from anyway."

## A SERIOUS STEP LIGHTLY TAKEN

Between two burrs on the map  
Was a hollow-headed snake.  
The burrs were hills, the snake was a stream,  
And the hollow head was a lake.

And the dot in *front* of a name  
Was what should be a town.  
And there might be a house we could buy  
For only a dollar down.

With two wheels low in the ditch  
We left our boiling car,  
And knocked at the door of a house we found,  
And there to-day we are.

It is turning three hundred years  
On our cisatlantic shore  
For family after family name.  
We'll make it three hundred more

For our name farming here,  
Aloof yet not aloof,  
Enriching soil and increasing stock,  
Repairing fence and roof;

A hundred thousand days  
Of front-page paper events,  
A half a dozen major wars,  
And forty-five presidents.

## THE LITERATE FARMER AND THE PLANET VENUS

*A Dated Popular-Science Medley  
on a Mysterious Light Recently Observed in the  
Western Sky at Evening*

My unexpected knocking at the door  
Started chairs thundering on the kitchen floor,  
Knives and forks ringing on the supper plates,  
Voices conflicting like the candidates.  
A mighty farmer flung the house door wide,  
He and a lot of children came outside,  
And there on an equality we stood.  
That's the time knocking at a door did good.

"I stopped to compliment you on this star  
You get the beauty of from where you are.  
To see it so, the bright and only one  
In sunset light, you'd think it was the sun  
That hadn't sunk the way it should have sunk,  
But right in heaven was slowly being shrunk  
So small as to be virtually gone,  
Yet there to watch the darkness coming on—  
Like someone dead permitted to exist  
Enough to see if he was greatly missed.  
I didn't see the sun set. Did it set?  
Will anybody swear that isn't it?  
And will you give me shelter for the night?  
If not, a glass of milk will be all right."

“Traveler, I’m glad you asked about that light.  
Your mind mistrusted there was something wrong,  
And naturally you couldn’t go along  
Without inquiring if ’twas serious.  
’Twas providential you applied to us,  
Who were just on the subject when you came.  
There is a star that’s Serious by name  
And nature too, but this is not the same.  
This light’s been going on for several years,  
Although at times we think it disappears.  
You’ll hear all sorts of things. You’ll meet with them  
Will tell you it’s the star of Bethlehem  
Above some more religion in a manger.  
But put that down to superstition, Stranger.  
What’s a star doing big as a baseball?  
Between us two it’s not a star at all.  
It’s a new patented electric light,  
Put up on trial by that Jerseyite  
So much is being now expected of,  
To give developments the final shove  
And turn us into the next specie folks  
Are going to be, unless these monkey jokes  
Of the last fifty years are all a libel,  
And Darwin’s proved mistaken, not the Bible.  
I s’pose you have your notions on the vexed  
Question of what we’re turning into next.”

“As liberals we’re willing to give place  
To any demonstrably better race,  
No matter what the color of its skin.

(But what a human race the white has been!)  
I heard a fellow in a public lecture  
On Pueblo Indians and their architecture  
Declare that if such Indians inherited  
The condemned world the legacy was merited.  
So far as he, the speaker, was concerned  
He had his ticket bought, his passage earned,  
To take the *Mayflower* back where he belonged  
Before the Indian race was further wronged.  
But come, enlightened as in talk you seem,  
You don't believe that that first-water gleam  
Is not a star?"

"Believe it? Why, I know it.  
Its actions any cloudless night will show it.  
You'll see it be allowed up just so high,  
Say about halfway up the western sky,  
And then get slowly, slowly pulled back down.

You might not notice if you've lived in town,  
As I suspect you have. A town debars  
Much notice of what's going on in stars.  
The idea is no doubt to make one job  
Of lighting the whole night with one big blob  
Of electricity in bulk the way  
The sun sets the example in the day."

"Here come more stars to character the skies,  
And they in the estimation of the wise  
Are more divine than any bulb or arc,



Because their purpose is to flash and spark,  
But not to take away the precious dark.  
We need the interruption of the night  
To ease attention off when overtight,  
To break our logic in too long a flight,  
And ask us if our premises are right."

"Sick talk, sick talk, sick sentimental talk!  
It doesn't do you any good to walk.  
I see what *you* are: can't get you excited  
With hopes of getting mankind unbenighted.  
Some ignorance takes rank as innocence.  
Have it for all of me and have it dense.  
The slave will never thank his manumitter;  
Which often makes the manumitter bitter."

"In short, you think that star a patent medicine  
Put up to cure the world by Mr. Edison."

"You said it—that's exactly what it is.  
My son in Jersey says a friend of his  
Knows the old man and nobody's so deep  
In incandescent lamps and ending sleep.  
The old man argues science cheapened speed.  
A good cheap anti-dark is now the need.  
Give us a good cheap twenty-four-hour day,  
No part of which we'd have to waste, I say,  
And who knows where we can't get! Wasting time  
In sleep or slowness is the deadly crime.  
He gave up sleep himself some time ago,

It puffs the face and brutalizes so.  
You take the ugliness all so much dread,  
Called getting out of the wrong side of bed.  
That is the source perhaps of human hate,  
And well may be where wars originate.  
Get rid of that and there'd be left no great  
Of either murder or war in any land.  
You know how cunningly mankind is planned:  
We have one loving and one hating hand.  
The loving's made to hold each other like,  
While with the hating other hand we strike.  
The blow can be no stronger than the clutch,  
Or soon we'd bat each other out of touch,  
And the fray wouldn't last a single round.  
And still it's bad enough to badly wound,  
And if our getting up to start the day  
On the right side of bed would end the fray,  
We'd hail the remedy. But it's been tried  
And found, he says, a bed has no right side.  
The trouble is, with that receipt for love,  
A bed's got no right side to get out of.  
We can't be trusted to the sleep we take,  
And simply must evolve to stay awake.  
He thinks that chairs and tables will endure,  
But beds—in less than fifty years he's sure  
There will be no such piece of furniture.  
He's surely got it in for cots and beds.  
No need for us to rack our common heads  
About it, though. We haven't got the mind.  
It best be left to great men of his kind

Who have no other object than our good.  
There's a lot yet that isn't understood.  
Ain't it a caution to us not to fix  
No limits to what rose in rubbing sticks  
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"Marvelous world in nineteen-twenty-six."

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